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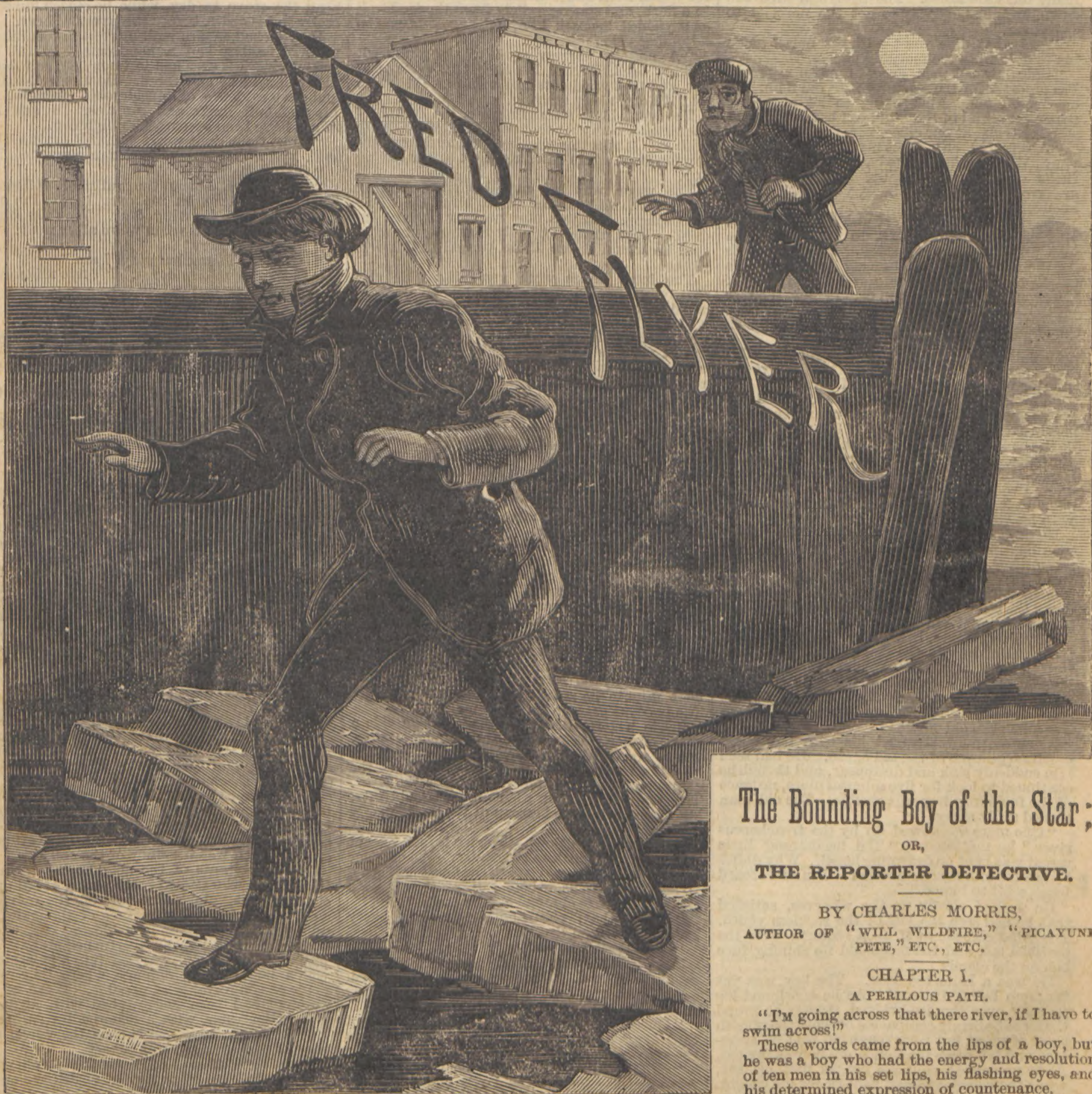
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THERE WAS BUT ONE THING FOR IT. FRED SPRUNG FORWARD, LEAPING FROM
MASS TO MASS, OFTEN OVER NARROW LANES OF BLACK WATER.

The Bounding Boy of the Star;

OR,

THE REPORTER DETECTIVE.

BY CHARLES MORRIS,
AUTHOR OF "WILL WILDFIRE," "PICAYUNE
PETE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A PERILOUS PATH.

"I'm going across that there river, if I have to
swim across!"

These words came from the lips of a boy, but
he was a boy who had the energy and resolution
of ten men in his set lips, his flashing eyes, and
his determined expression of countenance.

"It's jist ridik'lous. 'Tain't in the wood.
You can't do it, nohow. Don't ye see that the

ferry-boat can't travel 'count of the ice, and the same time the ice is got too much drift in it to go afoot? Ye'd best go home, little 'un, and go to bed."

"Not much, if the court knows herself."

It was an old waterman who was thus giving the benefit of his advice to the determined lad. The night was indeed a wild one. Snow had fallen all day long, covering the ground with a six-inch-deep blanket. The clouds had now broken, and the moon shone through their flying rack upon the surface of the wide river. It was a broad, white, glistening sheet of snow-covered ice. But the old boatman knew that it was treacherous. The ice had been drifting when the snow began, and no one could be sure that it was now fastened.

"What ails ye, anyhow? Does yer folks live t'other side? Come with me, and I'll give ye a shake-down fur the night. I wouldn't leave a dog out in sich weather."

"Much obliged," answered the boy. "It isn't that, though. I live on this side, but I've got business on the other."

"Bizness? There's cases where all bizness must stop, short of a funeral."

"It's worse than a dozen funerals," answered the boy. "There's two locomotives butted together across the river, and mercy knows how many folks are killed. The telegraph wires are down, and the only way to get the news is to cross over."

"And what d'ye want with the news? You kin read it all in the morning papers."

"Calculate not then, except I make a break. I'm reporter for the *Morning Star*, old man. I'm on duty, I am. Ain't going to let any other paper get ahead of the *Star*, you bet. We don't stop for trifle; at our office."

"A reporter, eh? Bless my eyes! A boy like you? Well, you'll have to back water this time, that's dead sure—Hillo, youngster, what are you up to? Come back, you risky young hound!"

The old chap sprung forward after the boy, who had made a quick dart to the end of the pier upon which they stood. He was too late for the agile youth. Lowering himself by his hands, he had dropped onto the icy surface of the river ere the waterman could reach the pier logs. The ice proved strong enough to bear him, and he quickly hastened out, while the old man gazed after him in angry terror.

"Come back, you lunatic!" he shouted. "It's tight here, but you'll be adrift afore you're quarter way out. Come back, I say."

"I'm going to take the chances," cried the boy, as he waded through the unbroken snow-sheet that covered the ice. "If I go under it will be in the line of duty. It's neck or nothing at our office. If you don't see a report of the railroad break-up in to-morrow's *Star*, you may know I've gone under. You can report at the office that Fred Flyer went down like a man, with his colors flying."

He pushed forward as he spoke. The waterman continued to remonstrate, but he received no answer. He stood on the pier, wistfully watching the diminutive form which grew smaller with every step. A gust of wind swept down the stream raising the snow in drifts, and hiding the boy from sight.

"By Davy Jones, he's gone! No, there he is again. Ha! he's in the drift, now. The ice is tipping with him. Down goes the little fool! He's up again! He's up and off! Brave fellow! He'll cross yet! No, no, he's under! By the Lord, the boy's drowned, and me standing here like a helpless old idiot!"

The waterman strained his eyes but could catch no glimpse of the lad again. He had seen him suddenly sink and disappear, and though he continued to look for five minutes more, no trace of the foolhardy boy was visible. The old man turned sadly away.

"One more swallowed up by the treacherous river," he muttered. "The headstrong little rascal was bent on drowning hisself. Why didn't I grab for him a minute sooner? I'm half afeard I was a bit to blame."

He walked slowly up the wharves, satisfied that he had seen the last of the reckless youth. The wind sighed, as if in a requiem over the perished lad, and the moon hid its shining face behind the clouds.

He was a little too soon. The boy was yet far from being drowned. As he continued his journey over the ice-bridged stream he found the ice to be firmly compacted beneath the smooth sheet of snow, but very rough, so that he stumbled and fell more than once ere he was far out. As he proceeded, ominous cracks met his ear, while the ice swayed and bent under his weight. At length a piece suddenly yielded beneath him.

The waterman was right. He had crossed the region of firm ice and was among the drifting blocks.

A quick spring brought him to the center of the block. It floated slowly on, carrying him down the river. The wind blew coldly past, cutting his face with the tingling snow-drift. Fortunately he was well gloved and warmly clothed. He set his lips with vigorous resolution, and looked ahead for chances.

The block on which he was, floated on, grinding against other floating masses. There was but one thing for it. Fred sprung forward, leaping from mass to mass as they touched, or sometimes over narrow lanes of black water. This was a perilous procedure. One block, to whose edge he had leaped, bent far below the water. He would have been hurled into the stream had he not flung himself forward at full length. The balance being restored, the mass of ice slowly righted itself.

This was the disappearance which the waterman had seen. The boy continued to lie at full length, waiting for chances. The block, too small for his weight, settled until his clothes were drenched with the ice-cold water of the river. It floated on through an open space for several minutes, when it brought up against a much larger cake. This was the opportunity for which Fred had waited. He was on his feet in a flash, and sprung agilely from the ice-block as it yielded beneath him, lighting erect on the adjoining cake.

"A mighty narrow squeak," he muttered, looking back. "And I'm as wet as a drowned rat, and that wind cuts like a knife. I'll freeze stiff if I don't keep stirring."

The wind blew strongly down the center of the stream, carrying the snow in blinding drifts with it. It was this that had hindered the waterman from again catching sight of the daring boy.

The moon was hid now behind a drifting cloud. The snow in the air darkened the whole atmosphere. It was now neck or nothing indeed. Fred plunged blindly forward, knowing that he would freeze if he paused in his wet clothes.

The loose cakes were generally wide and closely compacted, so that he made his way onward in comparative safety. Once, however, a block dipped suddenly beneath him, and shot him helplessly into the black running water. It was a perilous instant. He grasped the edge of the ice-block. Fortunately its surface was rough, and offered a hold to his fingers. He drew himself out of the water onto the yielding mass. Creeping to its center, he rose to his feet, the water streaming from his clothes.

"That point's settled, anyhow," he declared between his clenched lips. "I can't be wetter. But if I don't want to turn into an icicle I must drive on."

Onward he went. A few more narrow escapes and his feet struck firm ice. He took off his cap and waved it in the air.

"Hurrah!" he shouted. "Struck the solid stuff again, and all's glorious!"

He had come far over the icy Delaware, and the wharves of Camden were not far distant. He ran hastily onward, as fast as the snow would permit, eager to get out of the freezing wind. In five minutes more he was close to the Jersey shore. In ten minutes he had reached the end of a pier, and was clambering up the wharf logs by the aid of protruding spikes. The next minute he stood erect and safe on shore! The perilous passage had been made!

Inside a ferry-house on the Camden side a group of men was gathered around a huge stove, whose reddened sides sent a flood of warmth into the room. They were talking about the chances of taking a ferry-boat over the river. The majority shook their heads doubtfully, but the principal spokesman of the party firmly declared:

"It's got to be done. The ice is fast, except in a narrow streak in the center. We can cut a lane through it, and smash the floating blocks. If it only tightens, which I think it will with this wind, a safe channel can be made."

"What's that?" cried another, as a loud, hasty knock came upon the door.

"Go and see who's there."

The rap was impatiently repeated ere the door could be opened. There was revealed a boyish figure, who ran hastily in, his teeth chattering with the cold.

"Guess you won't grudge me an ounce of that fire," he exclaimed, rushing forward into the enlivening warmth.

"Hillo! What does this mean?" cried the ferry-agent. "Why, the boy's coated in ice! He's half-frozen into a mummy! Where have

you been, little chap? Put yourself in this chair. Tumbled overboard, eh?

"You bet," answered Fred, between his chattering teeth.

"Tumbled overboard where?" queried another. "The river is frozen."

"It is loose in the middle," answered Fred.

"And suppose it is?"

"That's where I went in."

"Why, you young hound, you don't mean to say you've been out to the middle of the river?"

"I've been clear across it," answered Fred, proudly. "I took it on foot, and I had a floating and dipping old time in the middle. You bet that fire smells good!"

The men were looking at him in doubt, surprise, and admiration. It appeared impossible, yet the boy did not seem to be lying or bragging.

"You are not in earnest?" cried the ferry-master.

"Ain't you stopped running your old boats?" asked Fred, querulously. "I had business on this side, and there was no way but to foot it. Guess I'm getting thawed out now. Won't some of you help me off with my coat and gloves? Want to get my rigging dried."

A number of willing hands aided the boy in this effort. His clothes were taken from him until he was nearly undressed. They were hung near the stove to dry, while he curled himself cosily in his chair, before the grateful heat.

They looked at him with interest and admiration. The boy had a handsome face full of resolution. His eyes had lost none of their flash in the danger he had faced. He was well-built, and gave evidence of considerable strength, in his well-knit limbs and muscles. In age he might have been seventeen or eighteen.

"Hope those duds won't be long drying," he said. "I must get into them again and be off."

"Off where?"

"Off to see about the railroad collision. That's what brought me over here. I'm reporter for the *Morning Star*. We folks don't let any trifle stop us when we're after news."

"You a reporter?"

"Just so. Young but spry, I am."

"But the wires are down. It's five miles out. No satisfactory report is in yet."

"There'll be engines running out?"

"Very likely."

"Then I'm after them, as soon as I'm dried. And what's the chance to get back to the city without wading? Are you going to keep your boats froze up?"

"We will make a break to get across early to-morrow."

"Book me then for the first boat. Us *Star* boys don't hang fire when there's news afloat."

CHAPTER II.

A RAILROAD SMASH-UP.

It was the old story over again. Two trains had tried to pass each other on the same track, with the usual result of making scrap-iron of the engines and kindling-wood of the cars. The incoming train had been delayed by snow-drifts on the track. The outgoing train had pushed on, thinking that the other would lay over at a way station. The blinding snow-drift had kept their head-lights concealed until it was too late to check their speed. Suddenly each engineer saw, rushing out of the gloom of night and snow flurry, a monster with a flaming eye.

A quick reversal of the levers; an application of the air-brakes; a leap for life of engineers and firemen; and then the two monsters met. A shock like the discharge of a park of artillery; a grinding and roaring and hissing of steam; successive shocks and splintering of wood, as car was heaped on car; then, most terrible of all, the cries, screams, and groans of human beings, hurled suddenly from vigorous health into the agony of gaping wounds, or into the arms of death. Such was the story of the collision.

The inhabitants of the neighboring town of Gloucester, who rushed to the scene, gazed upon a frightful spectacle. A row of the mangled dead lay on the white surface of the snow, lit up by the lurid glow of a blazing car, which had been kindled by an overturned stove. The wounded were being carried into a palace car, which had escaped damage, where they were made as comfortable as possible. Word of the accident had been telegraphed with all haste from Gloucester, with a demand for surgeons. But the frozen snow had broken the wires, and now all further word was cut off.

Two hours afterward a wrecking-train came down, with Fred Flyer for one of its passengers. He was thoroughly dried, warmed through,

wrapped closely up, and was ready for new adventures as when, two hours before, he had taken his plunge to the surface of the frozen Delaware.

Fred was a boy with an eye to business. The train no sooner stopped than he was out of it, note book and pencil in hand, and rapidly jotting down the interesting points of the accident. With an official brevity he questioned everybody, conductors, engineers, and passengers, forming a graphic story from the several statements.

"Get out, boy," cried one of the conductors, angrily. "What brings you bothering here? Away home with you, and get to bed. This is no place for boys."

"I calculate I can do a man's work," replied Fred, coolly. "Here is my warrant." He threw open his coat and revealed his reporter's badge. "I'm on duty, conductor, and I'd like to have from you a list of the names of the killed and wounded."

"Go ask them, then," answered the curt conductor, pointing to the row of dead bodies. "They've got more time than I have to answer questions." He turned shortly away.

"All right!" cried Fred, independently. "I'll nail you, anyhow. If you want to know what I think of you, just look for your character in the *Morning Star*."

This threat had a decided effect on the gruff conductor. He had no wish to be shown up in bad light in an influential newspaper, and he turned back to Fred with an ill-natured apology.

"I've got something else to do than to answer questions," he declared.

"You haven't got any more trains to smash just now; so I guess you can answer a few," replied the independent boy. "If I am a boy I know my privileges, Mr. Conductor, and I've a right to be treated civilly."

"Hope I haven't hurt your feelings. Here's a list of the names of the dead. Only five of them. That's not so bad, considering. I haven't got the wounded, yet. You can go ask them."

Fred hastened to do so. There were some twenty of the latter; a few of them very severely hurt. It was a distressing sight. The young reporter went among them full of boyish sympathy, yet full of business. There was something soothing in his voice and in the look of his pitying face, and the sufferers and the attending physicians readily answered his questions. These were few, but to the point.

One of the hurt men, however, with a broken leg, was gruff and surly. He was a man with a hard, harsh face, and a mouth that closed like a steel-trap—a large-framed, strong-limbed personage.

"Don't come pestering me," he snarled. "Isn't it enough to be lying here with a broken leg, without having bees buzzing around me? By Jupiter! if I don't make these railroad companies sweat for this job, it's queer!"

"I only want an account of the accident for the newspaper," explained Fred. "It will do you no harm to give your name."

"It will do me no good," snarled the man. "Hang the newspapers! They're all a pack of prying impertinents. If you want to do some decenter work, I wish you'd look around for my wife and child. They were spilled out of the train, and I'd like to know where in thunder the woman is mooning when I'm laying here helpless."

"Perhaps she is among the dead?" suggested Fred. "There are two women. Give me the name and I will see. I have the list here."

"You're bound to screw it out of me, then," answered the wounded man with an oath. "Brierly, then. Bob Brierly's my name. I won't cry much if you do have Mrs. Brierly's name there, confound her!"

"You haven't the luck you are wishing for," answered Fred, in disgust. "She is not here."

"So much the worse. Look for her then. Hang her, to leave me here groaning like a sick baby!"

Fred turned away. He had enough of Mr. Brierly.

He however, thought it was no more than his Christian duty to search for the lady in question. But his search proved in vain. She was not among the dead or wounded, and he failed to find her among those passengers who had been fortunate enough to escape unhurt, or with slight contusions. Some of these were grouped on the snow outside. Others were seated in warmed-up cars, waiting anxiously till a train should be brought down to take them up to the city. But though there were many ladies, none answered to the name of Mrs. Brierly.

He returned to the wounded man with this information.

"She may have gone to Gloucester," he suggested. "It is not a mile off, and several of the passengers have gone over."

"Blast her, she is trying to run away from me!" cried the furious husband. "She threatened it, hang her! If I don't pay my lady up for this, set me down for a fool, that's all. She ought to know by this time who she's dealing with."

"Very likely she does," answered Fred, severely. "She'd be a fool if she don't run away from such a brute. And if I meet her, I'll tell her so."

He turned and walked angrily away, leaving the irate husband to curse growlingly to himself.

"Got your points?" asked the conductor, as Fred appeared outside.

"All down," replied the boy, depositing his note-book in an inside pocket, and buttoning his overcoat. "Now what's the show for Camden? I must get there in short meter."

"Don't know. I've sent for a train to take off the passengers. May be here in five minutes, or in an hour."

"Or two hours. Can't take the chances. I'll foot it over. It isn't more than four miles."

"You'll find it a heavy drag through the snow. Best wait."

"It isn't more than three inches on a level. Duty is duty. Guess I'll try it."

Buttoning his overcoat to his throat, and drawing on his fur-lined gloves, Fred dashed bravely away, through the night and the snow.

The moon was now shining clearly, lighting up the landscape, and displaying the railroad tracks like two black lines in a sea of white. He followed the track as the straightest road to the city.

The cold wind at times made his face tingle, but he trudged bravely on, rather enjoying it than otherwise. A wade through the snow, and a cold air bath, were a frolic to his young blood. Here and there heavy drifts crossed the track, needing some deep wading, but in other places the snow was blown clean away, and he made good progress.

He had advanced something over two miles in this way, when scattered houses in the outskirts of the city began to appear. In some few of them lights were visible. The night had now nearly passed. A faint glimmer on the eastern horizon showed that day was approaching. These lighted houses were probably those of early laborers.

"It's fun to me," declared Fred, "but there's some that might not enjoy it. That Brierly's wife, for instance. What has become of the woman?"

He stopped in his soliloquy as something ahead caught his eye. It was a dark object, plainly outlined against a bank of the white snow. Fred eyed it curiously as he came nearer.

"About the size and shape of a human being," he said to himself. "Is it some poor creature out in this wild night?"

A few minutes brought him close to the object in question. The moonlight shone brightly upon it. A loud exclamation broke from his lips.

"By Heaven, it is a woman!" he cried. "Some poor thing caught out in the snow, and frozen. And what's that? Bless me, if she isn't got a baby, wrapped up in her shawl!"

It did not take the boy long to leap from the track to the wayside snow-bank against which the woman had fallen. She was apparently insensible, but whether dead or not he could not tell. Her face felt warm to his hand.

He shouted sternly in her ear, shaking her at the same time.

"Come, rouse up! What are you doing here? Do you want to freeze stiff?"

The woman opened her eyes, and a groan sounded from her lips, as a look like that of a frightened deer came upon her face.

"Who is that?" she asked, in faint, trembling accents. "Is it you, Robert?"

"No, but it's me, Fred. Come, stir yourself. You'll be a dead woman here in five minutes more."

The woman, with an effort, struggled to her feet, with Fred's help. He could see that she was young and very pretty. She clasped the babe more closely to her breast.

"I lay down exhausted," she murmured. "Are you sure I am safe? That I am not pursued?"

"Who is to pursue you?" he asked, curiously. "Did you come from the wrecked train? Are you Mrs. Brierly?"

"Ah!" she cried, with a scared look, breaking from him, and staggering onward. "You know

me! You have been sent after me! There is no escape from that brute, that fiend!"

"And you have come all the way here from the train, running away from him? He must be a rough hound, to make a woman run from him in such a night as this. I am your friend, Mrs. Brierly. I will help you if I can. And the first thing is to hunt a fire. You're not fit to stand this weather. And the baby?"

"The baby is warm. I keep it warm."

"Come with me. Here is a lit-up house not far ahead. The folks are astir there."

Partly supporting her he helped her staggering steps onward. Exhausted, and partly benumbed with the cold, she had wandered from the track, and fallen on the snow-bank in despair. But for Fred's opportune arrival she would have been quickly frozen to death. He had come just in time to save her life.

A loud and peremptory rat-tat on the door of the house which they had reached, and it was opened by an old woman, who peered cautiously out.

Fred quickly explained what had occurred. He had found the woman and child freezing. He had not a minute to spare. Would the good people take care of them for him? He would be back to-morrow, and see that they were paid for their trouble."

"Pay, boy? Who wants pay for bringing the dead to life? Fetch the poor soul right in. I have a good fire, and will soon thaw her out. Quick, fetch her in."

"Keep quiet here, and he will not find you," whispered Fred to the fugitive, as he aided her in. "Don't tell these folks who you are. I will try and come back to-morrow."

Seeing that she was nicely placed before a warm fire, he hastily bade good-by and started out.

In something over a half-hour afterward he burst briskly into the room at the ferry-house.

"Here I am with my report," he cried. "What are the chances of going over?"

"Jump for the boat, then. The chains are thrown off, and she'll be out in two minutes."

CHAPTER III.

FRED CONTRADICTS THE STAR.

"HERE you are! Here's yer *Morning Star*! Terrible accident! Fred Flyer, the young reporter, drowned in the ice! Have a *Star*, sir? All the news!"

"Drowned in the ice? Mercy, you don't tell me! How was that?"

"Crossing the Delaware on the ice arter news. Went under. Here it all is. Have a *Star*!"

The old gentleman eagerly bought one, anxious for the details of the accident.

"I'll have one, too," exclaimed a well-grown boy, who was hurrying up from Market street wharf.

There was a queer look on his face as he bought the paper and hastily turned to the item of news. It was, in fact, Fred Flyer himself, just landed from a ferry-boat which had come into the Market street ferry, after a sharp fight with the ice.

It was an odd welcome to be met with a newspaper report of his own death. Fred perused it with much interest, while a gay laugh broke from his lips.

"Bless my eyes, if this isn't rich! Here's the whole story; how I went under the ice and never come up again. Went down like a soldier in the line of duty. And a neat obituary notice, too, telling who I am, and what a fine chap I've always been. It's a queer thing that a fellow's always got to die before he wants to find out his virtues. Never heard them brag me up this way at the office."

He folded up the paper with a queer feeling, as if he had indeed in some way died, without knowing it, and had been resurrected.

"How did they get this bit of news? Ah! I know. It's that croaking old waterman. The fool has gone and reported me drowned at the office. I'll shoot right up there and give them a sight of my ghost. Do me good if I could only scare Old Crusty a bit."

People stopped to look at Fred as he made his way rapidly up the street. They thought he must have seen something very funny, for his face was wreathed in smiles, while every now and then he broke out into a loud laugh.

"If it isn't the richest job yet, I'll sell out!" he declared, slapping his knee in amusement. "A chap walking to his own funeral, with his obituary notice in his pocket. Hope I'll scare some of the boys blue."

In a few minutes afterward he broke into the editorial office of the *Morning Star*. It was filled with employees of the paper, engaged in

various duties. All looked up at the loud slam which Fred gave the door, and there was instantly a hasty springing to their feet, dropping of pens, paper and scissors, and a chorus of loud exclamations. One or two nervous fellows turned white and started for the door.

"Here's your ghost!" cried Fred, cheerily.

"Fred! Fred Flyer! The deuce! Can't be you was seen dead!" were the cries that broke from the lips of the startled editors.

"Guess next time you'd best wait till a chap's dead before you order his coffin. Hope you didn't think Fred Flyer was going to be drowned like a rat? Not much."

"Then what ailed that old jackanapes, to bring such news to the office?" exclaimed the chief editor, angrily.

"I ain't responsible," answered Fred. "Anyhow, you've had an item of news; and I've found out what sort of a chap I am. Got it all here in print, in my pocket. You can't go back on it. You can put out another item, telling how I came to life again. I'll give you the story. Had a narrow slip-up, you bet. But that ain't to the point. I've got what I went for. Been over and seen the smash-up. Got full report here. List of dead and wounded. Ahead of any other paper. Get out an extra, immediately. Ought to be on the street in half an hour. Takes the *Star* to discount them slow coaches."

Ere he had half-finished the chief editor had sprung forward and snatched the note-book from his hand.

"First-class, Fred. You're a brick. Good as ten dead men, hang me if you ain't. Here, Joe, Harry, be alive. Have this set up, instant. Hurry it up. Run off an extra with lightning speed. Why, the boy is worth his weight in gold."

There was a quick rush from the office in different directions, a momentary excitement, then all settled down again.

"You'll find it all in good shape," remarked Fred. "I wrote it out crossing the ferry. Just put in an item that I've come to life again. I'll give you the particulars for to-morrow's paper. And now I must streak out for home. I want some breakfast, and a trifle of sleep. And I want to get home before they get the front door hung in black. I'm afraid the folks will hear of that confounded item of news. I'd like to punch the head of the old hunks that gave it to you."

He was off like a flash, leaving the inmates of the office to follow him with admiring eyes, and to talk over his good points while he was hurrying cheerily along the street.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FLOWER OF THE FAMILY AT HOME.

FRED'S domicile was at a considerable distance from the office, but his rapid walk soon brought him to it, and he broke into the house with a cheery laugh and a hearty welcome that startled the inmates of the room.

His father and mother, and a small group of brothers and sisters, were seated around, looking dismally gloomy, as Fred burst in among them. They sprang up with cries of alarm and gladness.

"Mercy on us, what's this?" cried the mother.

"It's the boy himself, and that's all a confounded lie, as I said it was," declared the father, with an I-told-you-so air.

"You've seen that rascally paper, then?" demanded Fred. "Hoped I'd get home first, but had to stop at the office. I ain't gone under yet, and ain't going under soon, nary time."

The whole group had now gathered around him, the mother clasping him to her breast, with tears in her eyes, while one of his younger brothers embraced Fred's leg, and howled in sympathy.

"If you'd only give up that business," said the weeping mother. "You don't know how we were frightened. I'm sure you'll be killed yet."

"You take too big risks, boy," grumbled the father. "There's no sort of reason in it."

"I'm sound now, anyhow," answered Fred, cheerily. "And I won't try the river again on floating ice, if all Jersey blows up, I promise that. And now, mother, what have you got to eat? I'm as hungry as a wolf. I suppose you've saved me a bite."

"That I have, though I was afraid you'd never be here again to eat it. It will be a month before I get over the start that paper gave me. Get off your overcoat, Fred. I'll have your breakfast ready in a minute. I hope I'll never have such a fright again."

She was in a busy bustle as she spoke, setting Fred's warmed-up breakfast on the table, and pouring him out a cup of scalding-hot coffee.

She could not keep her eyes off him as she did so.

"To think it was all a false alarm, and that I've got my Fred again! Thank the Lord for His mercies!"

Meanwhile brothers and sisters had been eagerly helping Fred off with his coat, hat and gloves, while the father sat in a corner, growling to himself, yet looking at his recovered son with a deep satisfaction in the corners of his eyes.

"That's the stuff," cried Fred, as he took a deep sip of the hot coffee. "I'd have given a gold mine for that last night, when the wind was cutting me like a knife. What else have you got? Buckwheat cakes and sausage. Couldn't suit me better, nohow."

His breakfast, however, was not made in as much peace as he would have preferred, for he was besieged with a hundred questions, which he had to answer between the mouthfuls.

"Here, drop all that," he cried, impatiently. "I'll starve if you don't stop. Wait till I'm through and I'll give you the whole story."

And he resolutely refused to answer another question until he had finished a hearty meal.

Then he seated himself before the stove, and gave to his excited and admiring auditors the whole story, from the time the news of the accident had reached the office until his return to the city, with a full report of the occurrence. There were starting eyes and shuddering breaths as he told the tale of his narrow escape from drowning, and his mother again excitedly clasped him in her arms, as if to make sure that she indeed had him safe.

The story of his return to the city, of the struggle of the ferry-boat with the ice, the grinding and heaving, the scudding and scraping, and the long and fierce fight ere victory was accomplished, and the wharves of Philadelphia reached, was little less exciting to the spell-bound auditors.

And the remaining episode, the Mrs. Brierly rescue, and her flight through the storm from her brutal husband, capped the climax. Never had a story-teller such an excited and interested audience.

"There, that's about all," exclaimed Fred, at last. "Now for a snooze, for I've got to strike for Camden again, to see about the poor woman— Do you hear that?" he continued, as a cry arose in the street. "Extra *Morning Star*! There's the whole story of the smash-up, now. And if you want to find out if I'm alive or not, just read that. I don't want to find out, for I'm sure of it now. Don't disturb me before noon, for I'm about fagged out."

Fred marched off up-stairs to bed, leaving the family below to talk over the deeds of their young hero, and to congratulate themselves on having such a brave fellow as Fred as son and brother.

"I'm going to be a reporter, too, when I grow up," declared an ambitious ten-year-old. "And I'm going to wade across the ice, and jump through the fire after news, just like our Fred. See if I don't!"

"Crow ahead, little chap," said the father, taking him on his knee. "It doesn't cost anything to crow, and I guess you've the making of a fine fellow. But Fred's a terror of a boy, and no mistake."

It was full noon ere Fred awoke and made his way down-stairs, still looking sleepy. But a souse of head and hands in cold water, and a good dinner made him fully himself again, and buttoning himself up warm, he started out into the sharp, wintry day, bound for Camden.

"Take care you don't run any risks to-day," warned his mother at the door. "If the river isn't right, don't you cross."

"All right, mother," answered Fred, cheerily, as he kissed her good-by. "I calculate last night's business was enough of the kind for one day. I won't try it on again."

Yet what he did try seemed almost as dangerous. The ferry-boat had no easy job in crossing. It had made a lane through the solid ice, but all the ice in the middle of the river was loose and floating, and the huge cakes surged up against the boat as if they would break through her stanch sides. The grinding, ripping and rending was frightful, and all breathed more freely when they had passed the floating rack. An hour had passed ere the battered boat drew into the slip at Camden.

Fred hastened back through the town. He had marked the location of the house in which he had left Mrs. Brierly, and made the best of his way thither.

The door opened quickly to his knock, and the

old woman, whom he had seen the previous night, reappeared.

"How d'ye do? Come in!" she exclaimed.

"The poor lady wants to see you."

Mrs. Brierly broke into the passage ere Fred could reach the room, and rushed excitedly toward him, with a face still marked by fright.

"Is all right?" she eagerly demanded. "Has he found out where I am?"

"Calculate not," answered Fred, cheerily, as he pushed in.

CHAPTER V.

FRED GETS AN IDEA.

"STRANGE SEQUEL TO THE TERRIBLE RAILROAD ACCIDENT!"

"DISAPPEARANCE OF THE WIFE AND CHILD OF THE HON. ROBERT BRIERLY, OF MONTANA!"

"This honorable gentleman, who, as our readers will remember, was among the wounded by the collision, is in sore distress about his wife and child, who have not been seen since the night of the occurrence. They were in the palace-car, which he had left just before the collision for the smoking-car. None of the inmates of the car were injured, and all are accounted for with the exception of Mrs. Brierly. It is feared that the poor woman, who is said to be rather feeble-minded, wandered off in her terror, and became lost in the snow-drifts of that terrible night. A close search for the missing lady is being made. No trace of her has yet been found, but she cannot long remain missing. The distress of the bereaved husband in his terrible loss is pitiable to behold, and it is sincerely to be hoped that nothing serious may have happened to her."

"Distress of the old boy!" cried Fred, as he angrily folded up the newspaper containing this announcement. "If that ain't taffy, then I don't know what taffy is. I thought that chap was a barking dog, but he's worse than that. He's a snake in the grass. If he ain't been buttering that reporter's brains, then I'm a donkey. Bet you high he couldn't put no such stuff off on this coon, nary time!"

This newspaper item appeared on the day after his journey to Camden, to visit Mrs. Brierly. On that occasion the poor lady, who was terribly in dread of her savage husband, had given Fred a sketch of her life which stirred up the impulsive lad to warm sympathy.

"He's a hog, that's what he is!" cried Fred, on hearing her story. "And I'm the chap that would like to tell him so, only that he's got his leg broke. I don't want no odds of that sort. Don't believe in taking advantage of a man with a broken leg. But, I ain't going to stand by and see you swallowed up, nowhow."

"You cannot imagine what a life I've led," groaned the poor wife, whose pretty, girlish face was full of distress. "He has treated me shamefully. And it is all because I will not consent to surrender my fortune to him."

"I wouldn't give the galoot a red cent, if I was you," protested Fred, warmly. "Where's his own money? He's an honorable, and that sort ought to have cash."

"He has spent it all in politics," answered the wife. "He would spend mine, too, only my father on his death-bed made me promise not to give him a penny to squander. I have refused to do so, and that is the trouble."

"But what makes you run away? He can't get it if you keep stiff on that figure. 'Tain't in the law to make you pony over."

"You don't know what a fiend he is," was the moaning reply. "He has led me a terrible life. But, that is not all. He has brought me East for a purpose. He has threatened me with something dreadful. I know that he has devised some brutal scheme to force money from me. What it is, I know not, but the railroad accident was a godsend to me. It gave me a chance to escape."

Fred looked at her with some contempt at her weakness. He was too bold and daring himself to appreciate such a feeling. And he knew too little of life to understand the power a brutal husband might have over a weak wife. His lip curled slightly, but he said nothing. There are cases where a wise man or a shrewd boy deems it judicious to hold his tongue.

"What is to become of me?" she moaned, wringing her hands in distress. "I know no one here. I have scarcely any money. He will set all the officers of the law on my track. I cannot escape him! Oh, I know I cannot escape him! My child! my child!" she exclaimed, catching up her little daughter in her arms, "what is to become of us? We have no hope, no safety from your terrible father!"

Fred looked at her, with a curl in his lip and a flash in his eye.

"Just you keep up your spirits, ma'am," he

said. "I've took this job in tow, and I ain't going back on it. He's got to discount Fred Flyer before he snatches you, and that ain't no baby's job. Only you keep a stiff upper lip, and see if we don't settle Mr. Bob Brierly's hash yet."

"You!" she cried, her eyes opening wide in mingled dread and hope. "Oh, no! You would only be getting yourself into trouble. I could never, never consent to that. You do not know what kind of a man my husband is."

"And he don't know what sort of a boy I am," answered Fred, stolidly. "But he's going to find out, if he runs afoul of me, now you bet. I don't want no better fun than to astonish Mr. Brierly. Just you leave me alone, and see if I don't take the starch out of him!"

Mrs. Brierly's eyes opened wide in hope and admiration. Fred was a revelation to her. She had never seen a boy of that kind before. Brought up in the Far West, she knew little of city life, and had never come across a genuine, wide-awake, high-pressure city boy, sharp as a steel-trap, and ready to take anything in hand, from selling peanuts to running a locomotive. She continued to look at her bright and brisk young friend as one might look at a leopard in a menagerie.

"But what can you do?" she queried, with a voice full of doubt.

"I don't know," answered Fred. "But something's got to be done, and that spry. Just let me get my working cap on, and I'll hit on something. You can't stay here, that's flat. I don't know these people, and ain't going to trust them. Leave it all to me. I've got half an idea in my head. Only you keep cool and quiet, and I'll drop things around all right afore a crow could caw!"

Fred seized his hat and made for the door.

"Where are you going?" she cried in alarm. "I am afraid to stay here. Something may happen. You do not know how terrified I am."

"Don't see as there's anything to be skeered at just now," answered Fred, shortly. "Just you keep cool, Mrs. Brierly. If you're going to be skittish, you'd spoil the best game as was ever got up. If you're going to play that hand then I'll throw up the cards instanter."

"Oh, no, no! You must not desert me!"

"Then you mustn't play the baby. If I'm going to help you you've got to help me. Old Nick couldn't do nothing with his hands tied, and if you're laying out to tie mine it's all up. Now just keep up your heart, Mrs. Brierly, and trust a boy that don't turn back for nothing. You'll see me ag'in to-morrow."

Fred dived out of the house like a shot. He had enough of that sort of women for the present.

"Good gracious!" he growled, "I wouldn't give a cent a cart-load for folks without a backbone. A chap gets clear wilted down talking to some folks. Takes the starch out of you like rain does out of a standing collar."

Off to the ferry he dashed, stopping only to pick up a Camden item or two in his way. He had an idea in his head, but Fred always kept one eye open for business. No item of news ever escaped his sharp eyes.

The ferry-boat had now made a definite channel through the ice, and crossing had become less difficult. They were making their regular trips. Within an hour Fred was at the office of the *Morning Star*.

He delivered what items of news he had picked up, and was about to take his departure, when he was called by the chief editor.

"See here, Fred," said the latter, in his brisk, sharp way. "How about this item of news that's just come in? There's a woman and a baby missing from the railroad smash-up. How comes it you didn't pick that up, eh? You've let the *Telegraph* get in a point ahead of us."

"S'pose it has," answered Fred quickly. "Can't help it if they pick up some of our spilt crumbs. I'd look hoggish if we snapped up everything."

"I don't begrudge them the cold scraps of the news," laughed the editor. "But this is your job, boy. I want you to go for that woman. There's a mystery here, and that's what the dear public wants. Pick her up, and bring her in, if it's in the wood."

"All right," answered Fred, evasively. "I'll give you an item before long. It will be a scorching one, too. Hope you won't be afraid to publish it."

"The *Star* is afraid of nothing," rejoined the editor. "What is it, Fred? You know something about this affair?"

"I've got a point about the Honorable Bob Brierly," replied Fred. "He's a galoot, right

out from the shoulder. I'm going to tickle him, through the *Star*, if you'll put it in."

"Not too sharp, Fred. He may tickle us in return, through the courts. Come, what have you hit on?"

"It is not in shape yet," answered Fred, shortly. "Ain't going to leak till it's all ready to come out. Anything more, Mr. Brace?"

"No," answered the editor, a little angrily.

Fred walked out. He had nothing more to say, and did not think it advisable to keep up the conversation. As for letting his secret get afloat in the editorial room, he was too sharp for that.

CHAPTER VI.

THE YOUNG REPORTER'S LITTLE GAME.

AN hour afterward the young reporter was at home. He found his mother busy in the mysteries of cooking. Supper was frying and hissing away on the stove, while the small fry of the house were looking hungrily on, and taking in the appetizing smell.

"Mother," cried Fred, bustling in, "where does Mrs. Maloney live?"

"Mrs. Maloney? The Irish washerwoman? What under the sun does the boy want with her?"

"To know where she lives," answered Fred, quietly.

"But what do you want to know where she lives for?"

"So that I can find the house when I go there."

"And what in the world do you want with Mrs. Maloney's house?"

"To see Mrs. Maloney."

The mother turned and made a clip with her cooking-fork at the vexing boy, who was as grave as a judge.

"You haven't told me where Mrs. Maloney lives," he repeated.

"And I don't think I will tell you very soon," she answered, sharply. "It is something new for Fred Flyer to answer his old mother with impudence. I didn't expect it of my son."

"Impudence, mother? But you might tell me where Mrs. Maloney lives."

"You are not going to get anything washed, are you?"

"It's a business secret, mother. You don't want me to tell business secrets?"

"I'm sure I never told any of your secrets, Fred. One would think you were afraid of me."

"There are too many ears about," answered Fred.

Mrs. Flyer, who was grown very curious about her son's secret, turned and drove the small fry from the room, as one might drive a brood of chickens. Holding the door of the room into which she had driven them she turned to Fred.

"Now, my son. Quick, while I keep them out."

"You remember, mother, what I told you about the poor lady with the baby that fell down in the snow?"

"Yes, yes!" eagerly.

"Don't speak of that on any account. Nobody must know of it."

"Wild horses couldn't draw it from me," answered the good woman. "You know there is nobody like me in keeping a secret. But why do you ask, Fred? There is something behind all this."

"Yes," answered Fred.

"What is it, my son?"

"Where does Mrs. Maloney live?"

Mrs. Flyer released her hold of the door with the angry intention of shaking the annoying boy. There came a very unexpected result. The small brood fastened within the room had been heaped three deep against the door, eager to hear something of the mysterious conversation. The released latch left the door loose. Open it flew with a splurge, and out came the inmates of the room in a volley.

In a moment the floor at Mrs. Flyer's feet was covered with a writhing heap of legs and arms, from which came a shrill chorus of the "music of the household," that would have shamed a locomotive-whistle.

That episode of course capped the climax, and Fred soon escaped from the Babel of slaps, shrieks and adjurations into the street, in possession of the number of Mistress Maloney's modest little down-town residence to which he bent his way, and soon was interviewing the lady of the house.

"Faix, an' I'm not quite distitute o' rooms althegither and intirely," declared Mrs. Maloney, in answer to the young reporter's inquiries.

Mrs. Maloney was a native of the green island of Erin. You only wanted a look at her nose, or an echo from her rich brogue to make sure of that. Yet she was not wanting in good looks, while a warm heart seemed imprinted on every line of her broad face.

"It won't be for long, Mrs. Maloney. The lady only wants a hiding-place for a short time."

"She kin stay till doomsday, if she's a mind. An' I'll only ax her to pay fur the trifle of vittels she aates, and maybe a bit to the back o' it fur extry trouble and soap. I ain't forgot the good friend your mother's been to meself, me boy. An' the poor crayter in diffikilty, too. What mought she want to be hidin' for, if it's no secret?"

"But it is a secret, Mrs. Maloney. I wouldn't like to ask you to trouble yourself about other people's affairs."

"Indade, and I've always had the riputation of niver tellin' nobody's bizness, 'cept me own, an' that somehow leaks out o' me unbeknownst. But if it's a poor crayter in trouble I kin be as dumb as an oyster."

"And you've got the room to spare?" queried Fred, evading the question about keeping secrets.

"Sure an' there's bigger rooms in a palace nor I kin offer her. An' finer furniture, and broader windys. And it's like the 'ating might be higher-toned. But a warm heart's better nor sunshine, me lad, and the laste room in the world spreads out when ther's a welcome in it. An' faix she's likely to have more welcome than mate, when she lives wid Kitty Maloney."

Fred laughed as he plunged out of the door, calling back:

"To-night's the time, then. Or maybe sooner."

He hurried away, for fear of further questions about his secret. He did not care to pour too much knowledge into such a leaky vessel as Mrs. Maloney.

CHAPTER VII.

MANAGING A WEAK WOMAN.

It was a busy scene when he re-entered the editorial rooms of the *Morning Star*. A dozen editors and reporters were seated round as many tables, the only sound in the room being the scratch of pens, as they traveled at lightning speed over broad sheets of paper. The news of the world was being manufactured at race-horse rate in that narrow apartment, and wise utterances, that were to astonish the city the next day, were being hammered and screwed out of half-empty brains.

The young reporter seated himself at his own particular desk, and was quickly as busy at the game as any of the others. He had learned the art of making much out of little, which is so important a part of an editor's duty. To make a little matter look like a big one, and stretch a few ideas over a good deal of paper, is an art that does not come by nature.

"What have you got, Fred?" asked the news editor, who was making his round of the reporters. "Something spry, I hope."

"Fiddler's news," answered Fred, indifferently. "The market is as dead as a stone. Nothing doing. Everybody vegetating, and living on cold cabbage. Picked up a trifle or two, but—" and he shrugged his shoulders as if disgusted with the humdrum state of city affairs.

"Let me have them. What are they?"

"Mere trifles. Here's a boy run over by a street-car. Killed square out. Smashed flat. If he'd only been badly hurt now, there might be an opening for hospital items and lawsuits. It's aggravatin', the way folks get themselves done for. They don't take any interest in the newspapers."

"What else?" asked the editor.

"Another bit of the same kind. Suicide. A man hung himself, and then hid the rope he did it with."

"Hid the rope?" exclaimed the surprised editor. Hang it, Fred, that won't do! You are drawing the long-bow with a vengeance. How is a dead man going to cut himself down, and hide the rope? Come, come, the public won't swallow that."

"That's my item, anyhow," answered Fred, sturdily. "And I ain't going back on a word of it. Don't tell me what the public won't swallow. Why, I told them last week about a hog doing a hard sum in arithmetic, and they took it all in. You've only got to grease your items, and they'll go down slick enough. And see what a neat opening I've got here. I can tell to-morrow all about the finding of the rope. After he had got enough hanging he stuck the

rope in his pocket, for fear of giving a shock to his family. Then the next day we might bring him to life again. Make it out all a case of strabismus. That will satisfy the public, and stretch out the item."

"I think you are a decided case of moral strabismus," laughed the editor, as he snatched up Fred's manuscript. "Away with you, you young rascal. You will destroy the character of our paper if you keep on. Bring in something true and lively, if you can. And keep clear of lies."

"Lies!" answered Fred, as he seized his hat. "Just let any fellow of my size call me a liar, and I'll plug his head. You're too big for me, so I'll let you off. But I'll tell you this, if you were to prune all the lies out of any newspaper there wouldn't be much more than a blank sheet left. Suppose I don't know?"

Fred left the room with a merry laugh, and dashed down the stairs like a foot-ball that has been well kicked.

It was in crossing the ferry to Camden that he read the newspaper item which we have given at the head of the last chapter. The boy was thrown into a brown study. Here was trouble ahead. That item would set the whole public on the lookout for Mrs. Brierly. It was known that she was missing. That she was a person of importance. No offer of a reward for her recovery was in the paper he read, but such an offer, and a description of her appearance, would very likely be given in some of the papers.

"I'm afeard there's going to be a blue time in getting her over the ferry," said Fred to himself, as he set his lips firmly. "There might be a thousand sharp eyes on the lookout. But it's got to be done. I ain't going to be discounted in this game, nary time. Lucky the folks she's with ain't the sort that reads the newspapers. I've got to get her away before they hear what's in the wind. There's no odds in this business, Fred Flyer. You've got to be spry, or you'll get left, I tell you that. You'd best get on your thinking-cap, instanter."

Fred settled down to a deep study of the situation. But he had reached the house where his *protegee* was in hiding ere he could come to any definite plan. He had made up his mind to take her over the ferry, but it might not be so easy an undertaking.

The runaway wife had a very disconsolate look upon her face when Fred burst cheerily in. If she had owned the world, and had just lost it, she could not have looked more gloomy. But he was as bright as a blue-bird, and her face lighted up on seeing his cheery countenance.

"I have been in *such* a way!" she declared. "It is so long since I saw you. And I was so afraid of being found."

"I've been working, Mrs. Brierly," he cheerily answered. "You've got to get out of here, that's flat. But I've got a safe place laid out. Haven't been any strange noses poking around here, have there?"

"What do you mean?" she asked, in alarm.

"Folks prying about. Trying to pick up items. None of that sort, eh?"

"No. All has been quiet. Why do you ask? Is there danger?" Her face grew pale, and a shudder of fear ran through her.

"Dunno," said the boy, as he threw off his hat and seated himself before the trembling fugitive. "He's waking up, Mrs. Brierly, that's a fact. Folks are hunting you. But you needn't get skeered about that."

"What is to be done?" she asked, wringing her hands helplessly.

"I'll tell you what's to be done," began Fred, earnestly. "You've got to get up some backbone. If you're going to be like a wilted-down leaf, the dog's dead. Just look at me. I was never skeered in my life; and I don't believe I could be. Now, just take after me, and we'll go through swimming."

"I wish I was only a little more like you," she replied, looking with admiration into his open, steadfast face. "If I only had the least bit of your courage! I don't know how I will ever repay you for your kindness."

"Oh, pshaw! that's all nonsense. You don't s'pose I'm a pig, to let you get snatched up again? Why, there ain't a boy in these diggings that wouldn't do as much and more, too. Just you shut down on all that nonsense. See here, Mrs. Brierly, there's only one trouble. We've got to go across the ferry, and I'm afeard, somebody will be on the lookout there."

"The ferry?" she answered. "What shall we do? Could I not disguise myself somehow?"

"I had a notion of bringing over a suit of my clothes," rejoined Fred. "We are about of a

size, and I thought you might dress up as a boy, and go over that way."

She looked at him for a moment with an expression of bewilderment, and then burst into a ringing laugh.

"Dear me, what a figure I would be!" she merrily exclaimed. "If that isn't a boy's idea! No, no; I can't do that. And it would only make things worse. I'd be sure to be recognized as a woman."

"You might cut off your hair, and comb it like a boy's," rejoined Fred, pleased to have roused her from her depression. "And I could get you some newspapers or shoe-blackening to sell. I think it would be prime."

"Thank you for the idea; but I do not care to lose my hair! And what is to be done with the baby? Boys don't carry babies."

"Don't they, then? That's all you know about it," cried Fred, with energy. "It's queer if I haven't carried babies enough. Regular little squallers, too. Why, there's half a dozen young ones in our house. And when they get on their muscle, you bet it's fun to carry them! I've been through that mill, and I know all about it."

She laughed again, at Fred's comical vehemence. He had certainly roused her up into cheerfulness.

"But how are we to manage about the baby?" she asked.

Fred looked at her with a serious countenance.

"Could we not put it into a pillow-case, with some feathers?" he suggested. "Then they'd think it was only a pillow. We could cover its head up in going over the ferry."

"And smother the poor dear."

"But it would only take about five minutes. Queer if it couldn't stand that much. It might start howling, though. They always do howl when you don't want them to. Don't believe it would work all right to have a howl coming out of a pillow."

"I am afraid you will have to give up the pillow project," answered the amused mother. Her face had wonderfully lightened up during Fred's absurd propositions.

"There!" he cried. "Just you look like that, and nobody will ever take you for a runaway wife. You can pass anywhere for a lively young girl. And, see here. It's a woman with a baby they're looking after. Let me take the baby. I know how to carry them now, you bet. You can come behind, and see that I don't run off with the pet. We can play that we don't know one another."

"An excellent plan!" she joyfully answered. "It must work. I will fix my hair to look very young, and try to keep a smile on my face. Let us go at once. I am so anxious to get away from here. What shall we pay these people for their trouble? Give them this. They have been very kind, and deserve to be well paid." She handed Fred a twenty-dollar bill.

"Much I'll give them *that*," he answered. "If you fling cash around that way you'll be poor before a week. And you'd only make them think there was something wrong. Just let me settle it. You get ready while I go to see the good woman."

Fred went in search of the woman of the house, leaving Mrs. Brierly to get herself up in the role of a young girl.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN INFANT ON THE WAR-PATH.

It was approaching the early night of mid-winter when a pair of wayfarers passed along the quiet streets of Camden, at a short distance apart. A cold wind was blowing inward from the river, that turned every drop of water it touched to ice, and sent chill shudders from nose to toes of every soul it encountered.

Of the two persons in question, one was a well-grown boy, who walked briskly along, clapping in his arms a bundle that might have been either a baby or a package of dry-goods, so closely was it wrapped up. The other person was apparently a young lady of sweet sixteen, to judge by her fresh, smiling face, her clustering ringlets, and the nimble way in which she tripped after the boy in advance.

Occasionally, however, the smile faded from her face, and was replaced by a look of deep care, while she gazed about the vicinity with the timid look of a hunted fawn.

The boy dropped back as they reached a deserted street. He fixed his eyes on her face with a look of warm admiration.

"If you only knew how pretty you was," he declared, "you wouldn't never wear your hair any other way than in curls."

"Go on, now," she laughingly replied. "If you

have nothing more sensible to talk about than that, you had better keep ahead."

"I don't see anything prettier to talk about," he roguishly continued. "Do you know this is the nicest baby I ever carried? Why, she just cuddles up like a caterpillar, and there ain't never a sign of a howl in her."

"Like a caterpillar? That's a nice comparison now, I declare. Oh, do go on now! There are people ahead. We must not be seen together."

"Never mind them. They're no account. Wait till we get to the ferry. My! ain't it scorching cold? Hope you ain't freezing."

"I am used to cold weather," she replied. "It is nothing here to what we have out West. Let me have the baby awhile. You must be tired."

"Me tired? With this little chip? I guess not. Why, she ain't heavier than a base-ball. I could carry her in my pocket, and think it was only a sugar-plum."

Fred moved ahead with a laugh of amusement, leaving the young mother highly gratified by the compliments to herself and her child. People were growing thicker now, and it was necessary to be circumspect.

It was not long before they reached the vicinity of the ferry. Fred halted and looked inquiringly around him. A look of satisfaction came to his face, as he heard the rumbling sound of car-wheels.

"Just in the nick of time," he declared. "There's a train coming in. We can get into the crowd, and nobody will ever think of noticing us."

He pushed through the ferry-house, paying his fare as he passed. Just inside lounged a sharp-faced person, whose eyes keenly observed every one who entered. They fell for an instant on Fred, who walked on with an air of indifference, clapping the bundle in his arms as though he were taking some soiled clothes to the washerwoman. The boy caught the keen eyes, that seemed to pierce him like a needle. He looked up in turn into the thin, sharp face of the observer.

A dozen thoughts rushed in a crowd through the wide-awake brain of the shrewd lad. This fellow wasn't here for nothing. The police had been put on the watch for Mrs. Brierly. There was danger in the wind unless he could be thrown off the track. In an instant Fred's plan of action was laid out. A look of impudent disdain came into his face.

"Guess you'll know me the next time you see me, won't you, Johnny?" he said, with a provoking leer.

"Who are you talking to?" cried the man, angrily.

"Thought you'd dropped something, that's all. Tain't no use boring a chap with eyes like auger-bits. I ain't got none o' your duds, if that's what you're looking for."

"Pass on, now. I want none of your slack. You're a good deal too fresh for a boy of your size. Move ahead, or I'll stir you up with something sharper than a pole."

"Just try stirring me up if you want some fun," answered Fred, impudently. "You'll find you've stirred up thunder and lightning. I ain't no slouch now. And I've paid my fare. Nor it wasn't no counterfeit neither. It's a high old ferry company that puts cops to watch their passengers."

The man started as if his youthful antagonist had made a home-thrust. He started angrily forward and laid his hand on Fred's arm.

"What have you got there?" he sternly asked. "Some stolen goods, I fancy."

Fred did not flinch, nor let his eyes drop before the keen suspicion of the man's looks.

"Maybe you'd like to take charge of it," he said. "It's only a baby as I was sent out with to tumble into the river. The folks got tired of it at home. If you want to adopt a nice healthy brat, that can squall like all sin, I ain't got no objection."

"Not much," answered the man, with a short laugh. "I am not doing any adopting. Push on now, my hearty. And look out you don't get into trouble with that saucy tongue of yours. Slide now, while you've got a whole skin."

"You won't take the baby, then?"

"Not much."

"All right. Then I'll have to heave it overboard, I s'pose. You bet I ain't going to carry the little rooster round all creation. Good-by."

Fred pushed on into the crowd that was coming from the train. He had gained his end. Instantly guessing that this person was a detective on the watch for Mrs. Brierly, the sharp boy had decided to make him angry and throw him off his guard.

until the fugitive wife had passed. The effort was successful. The lady had tripped nimbly past during the controversy, and was now some distance in advance. The mother's anxiety forced her to look back, however, to where Fred was still hectoring the officer. She was not quite satisfied to trust her pet in such reckless hands. The officer caught a glimpse of the girl's back-turned face just as Fred pushed on. A look of question came upon the sharp features of the detective.

The ferry-boat was well filled. Fred got a seat with his charge in the ladies' cabin. Mrs. Brierly sat opposite him, her eyes fixed greedily upon the motionless bundle in his arms. The child seemed asleep.

Out into the stream pushed the boat, following the narrow water channel cut through the frozen ice-plain. Fred slyly lifted a corner of the shawl that covered the child's face, and gazed down into the pretty, sleeping countenance.

"Poor little thing," he murmured, soothingly. "Won't never frow it into deriber. Guess he won't."

He stroked the velvety feet with soft fingers.

At that instant there came a shock that brought the boat up all standing, while a quiver ran through her every timber. The passengers were jerked sharply in their seats, and cries of fear were heard.

"What is it? What has happened? Is the boat going to sink?" came the cries.

"Don't get frightened, ladies," remarked a brisk young gentleman. "We are among the floating ice, that's all. Struck a cake. Never fear but we'll come safely through."

"Yow! yow! yow!" came from Fred's bundle. The child had been effectually awakened by the shock and after gazing up in frightened bewilderment, it gave vent to a series of yells that showed there was no trouble with its lungs at least.

"Keep quiet now, will you, little slip and go-down?" cried the boy, nursing the baby on his knee. "Just drop them bagpipes of yours. Why, you're worse than a pig caught in a gate."

Somehow this gentle admonition did not have the desired effect. The baby looked up into the strange face above her, and howled more vigorously than ever.

Fred got up and carried her, tossed her in his arms, patted her, but all without effect. The boat was still among the floating ice, and staggered onward, grinding its way, while it trembled like a wind-blown leaf.

"Won't somebody choke that squalling brat?" exclaimed a testy old gentleman in the corner of the cabin. "There ought to be a law to keep babies off of steamboats."

"Maybe you'd like to come and choke it?" cried Fred, indignantly.

"I don't think the world would have been any worse off if he had been choked himself when he was a baby, angrily exclaimed a matronly old lady. "I never could endure brutes."

"And I never could bear brats," rejoined the old bachelor, with a snarl.

"Suppose you nurse it yourself then, if you don't like my style," exclaimed Fred, laying the crying child deftly in the old man's lap.

Something like an oath came from the surly old fellow's lips. His face looked as if he had swallowed red pepper by mistake. He sprang hastily up, dropped his burden with a surge into his seat, and ran from the cabin, followed by a chorus of laughter, hisses, and indignant remarks from the ladies present.

"Old wretch!" was one of the mildest of the epithets that was applied to him.

"Guess I counter-marched on him," exclaimed Fred, with a gay laugh. "It was worse than a dose of opodeldoc. Come to its brudder ag'in, you pretty, tootsy thing—and stop your squalling, or I'll pound your head for you."

He caught up the child, that was screaming now as lustily as a locomotive engine. Fred danced along the deck, tossing, petting, soothing and shaking it in turns; but all in vain. Young Miss Brierly was on the war-path, and was not to be toned down so easily.

"It is a shame to give a child to the care of such a boy as that!" cried one lady, indignantly.

"He knows nothing about babies," answered a second. "Give me the little thing. I will quiet it down."

"Can't do it," exclaimed Fred. "I'll catch everlasting rats if I don't fetch it home safe. Some of you ladies might fall in love with the sweet little dear and vamoose with it. And then wouldn't I be in for snacks! Jerusalem, but I would!"

Mrs. Brierly had sat flushed and fidgeting during this scene. A dozen times she had half-risen, and then seated herself again. Now she could stand it no longer. She sprang hastily up, and snatched the child from Fred's grasp.

"Let me have it! You'll be the death of the child!" she cried, sharply. "You are sticking a pin in it, I know you are."

She hastily resumed her seat with her prize, and began a hasty search for the unknown cause of the yells which still came lustily from its lungs.

A dozen looks of disdain were cast at this youthful figure who thus dared to take the care of the crying child out of the hands of the more experienced matrons present. Sneering utterances expressed their opinion of her presumption.

"A mere chit of a girl like that!" exclaimed one. "What does she know about nursing babies?"

"All the young folks know more than their mothers nowadays," answered a second. "That's young America for you."

"She ought to be playing with a doll, instead of undertaking to nurse children," said a third.

"Give me the poor dear," cried a fourth. "Give it to a person of experience, who has nursed more children than you could count on your fingers."

"Excuse me, madam," answered Mrs. Brierly, with a soft smile. "Perhaps I was hasty. But you see the little dear is quieting already. She was only frightened."

In fact, the child, on getting a glimpse of the face above her, had suddenly brought her screams to an end, and was now merely sobbing, while a baby smile was trying to break through the tears upon her face, as the sunshine makes its way through the falling drops of an April shower.

"She may be only a girl, but she knows how to handle children," remarked a gentleman present.

"Maybe you want to hint that I don't," answered Fred. "I give in I don't know—how to handle little wildcats. But if you'd only let me alone I'd fetched her to after while. I just hate to be beat by a baby."

In one corner of the cabin sat a person with his face shaded by his hat, and a lurking smile on his face. It was the detective whom Fred fancied he had so shrewdly humbugged.

When the boat stopped this person put himself on the track of the boy, who had again taken the baby.

CHAPTER IX.

FRED INTERVIEWS THE HONORABLE.

"BRING report of how the wounded are getting on, Fred. They are all in the Pennsylvania Hospital, I believe. You might interview them too. Find out all about them, what they think about the collision, and what they are going to do about it. You might work up a column of spicy matter."

"Ay, ay," answered Fred, cheerily. "I'll bring out the points. Trust me for that. Get up something to make the railroad mad, if I can. It's fun to stir up the railroads."

"See here, boy, I don't want any of your fancy sketches. Don't bring anything but facts, mind you. It won't hurt, though, if they are a bit spicy. The good public likes plenty of mustard in its news."

"I'll give it all salt and pepper enough, you bet!" cried Fred, as he set off on his errand.

Several days had passed since the date of Fred's adventure with the baby. Mrs. Brierly was safely domesticated with Kitty Maloney, and happy in her temporary shelter from her brutal husband.

Of course, however, this state of affairs could not continue long. If he should discover her place of retreat, her position would be worse than before. She must do something without loss of time to place her property beyond his reach. But the poor thing knew no more about business than a robin, and remained helplessly trying to devise some project.

Meanwhile Fred made the best of his way to the hospital, in obedience to the orders received. He found the victims of the disaster in various stages of recovery—except two, who were already beyond recovery, as they were dead and buried.

The young reporter interviewed the others, hastily jotting down in his note-book their statements. Finally he came to the bed on which was stretched the Honorable Robert Brierly, with a face as sour as a crab-apple.

"Vamoose, now!" cried the latter grumly, on hearing Fred's errand. "Maybe you think it isn't enough to lie here with a broken leg, with-

out having a swarm of newspaper bees buzzing around. Slide now, while your skin's whole, blast you!"

"Just s'pose you save your temper to butter your doughnuts with," answered Fred, coolly. "A chap would think I was going to bite you. I never bite anything quite so sour, thank you. You might be proud to have a lively young fellow like me to help you kill time, instead of getting on your ear about it."

"Hang it, booby! do you think I want to get myself in the newspapers?"

"I'd like to know where you'd be if it wasn't for the newspapers?" replied Fred, smartly. "It's them that makes half you honorable. Don't tell me! I know the ropes. Come now, I want to give you a splurge, and a chance for a dig into the railroad."

"Deuce take the railroad! I'm going for it as soon as I get on my pins," exclaimed the invalid with an oath. "If I don't sweat it, shoot me! I'll let them see they can't toss M. C.'s about like potato-sacks. Blast and consarn it all! To be stretched here with a game leg just when I've got a lively job on hand. It's enough to make a Gospel sharp swear. Hillo, boy! I've seen you before, I take it."

"Shouldn't wonder," answered Fred, indifferently. "I'm always drifting around, more or less."

"You are the little jack-rabbit that was buzzing around the train after that confounded smash-up. I sent you out to look after my wife, smother her ugly picture! Where is she?"

"That's what I'd like you to tell me," answered Fred. "I want to interview her after I'm done with you."

"You do, eh? What for?" asked the husband, fixing his eyes with a suspicious look on Fred.

"To find out what made her fool enough to tie herself fast to a chestnut-burr," rejoined the boy. "I saw her, if you want to know, and I think it's a confounded shame for such a pretty, sweet-faced, soft-hearted little creature to be married to a horse-radish grater. Now go ahead. Let's have the balance of that item. I want to give you a spread in the *Star*."

Mr. Brierly gave a grim laugh. Instead of being angry at Fred's plain speech, it was just to his fancy. He had come from a country where people never minced their words. With a growl like a tickled bear he let out to the boy so much of his history as he cared to have published.

"And just say that I'm going to salt that railroad, as soon as I get on my pins," he concluded. "I won't take a rascally cent less than five thousand, and I call that dirt cheap. I'm going to speculate on that dashed company, now you bet."

Fred laughed, as he concluded jotting down his notes.

"See here, boy," cried Mr. Brierly, with a louder oath than ever. "You've seen that cream-faced runaway of a jade. My wife, I mean, blast her. Now I want that woman, and I'm bound to have her. I've got all the police of the city on the lookout now, but it's like geese looking after sheep. You're a sharp little rat, and you've seen the hussy. You're nosing around everywhere after news, too. Just pick her up and post me where she is, and it will be a good hundred in your pocket."

"Couldn't you make it a thousand?" asked Fred. "Boys of my sort don't take on detective work cheap."

"Yes; shoot it all! Put her in my hands, and I'll make it a thousand."

"And what will you do with her when you get a hold of her?"

"Hang on like grim death to a sick monkey. I'll stick to her tighter than tar to a nigger's wool. Bet I cure her of promenading. That's enough. It's none of your concern what I want her for."

"All right," answered Fred, as he pocketed his note-book. "I've only got one thing to say:—If I had that lady in my vest-pocket now, I wouldn't hand her over to you for a gold mine. You haven't got money enough to buy Fred Flyer. She'd never run away from you if you hadn't been a hog. She can stay away from me till the sky turns green. I ain't going to play second fiddle for no wife-bruiser. That's my signature, right out."

Fred turned on his heel and walked loftily away, followed by a volley of oaths from the invalid that would have annihilated him, if he had not been made of very solid flesh and blood.

As heedless of the raging fury of the man behind him as if his oaths had been only the wind

of butterflies' wings, Fred walked on toward the entrance of the hospital building.

He had reached the outer hall, when he met a man in close conversation with one of the managers, whose face attracted his attention.

It was the ferry-boat detective!

He had passed the boy without noticing him. Fred turned and looked after him suspiciously.

"Something in the wind," he muttered, shaking his head. "That fellow isn't here for nothing. There's the old Samuel to pay, and no pitch hot. Bet a coon's tail he's here for an interview with Bob Brierly; and I'm going to find out."

Turning, he followed the two men into the hospital wards, and traced them until they entered the private room occupied by the honorable invalid.

"Knowned it," growled Fred, discontentedly. "Thought I had him flung, but he didn't fling worth shucks. Wonder if he didn't see right through my little ferry-boat game? Mrs. Brierly had to look back and I saw his eyes on her. I'll go a cow that my cake's all dough. This sharp's tracked the woman, and he's here now to see what price he can sell her for to her husband. Lucky he didn't twig me. I've got to make a new deal."

In a minute Fred was in the street and on his brisk way to the office. A busy train of thought ran through his active brain as he proceeded. There was no use tracking the detective. He was as well satisfied that the latter knew the hiding-place of the fugitive as if he had followed him to Mrs. Maloney's door. She must be got away from there, and that soon. There was no telling how quickly her enemies might settle down on her.

He was soon at the office of the *Star*, where he lost no time in writing out his interview notes into as spicy an article as he could make of them.

"See here, Fred," cried the editor, on hastily glancing over the manuscript. "This Bob Brierly business won't do. We'll only get into trouble if we put it in. Can't publish such dynamite cartridges as that."

"It's solid truth, though," protested Fred.

"What? That his wife ran away from him through bad treatment?"

"Yes, and is hiding away now. I ain't bringing you any Tom Fiddler's news. Why, he's got all the police of the city quietly on the watch for her. Tries to make it out insanity. But that dodge won't work. I've seen him, and I know what sort of a potato-masher he is."

"All right, Fred. If you vouch for it, in it goes. It's spicy, anyhow, and we want spice, even if there's a trifle of risk. In it goes, and the Honorable Bob can kick with his lame leg, if he feels like it."

"It's solid logic, you bet!" laughed Fred, as he seized his hat and made for the door. "I'll swear to every word of it, and bring the woman up for proof, if she's wanting. I ain't done yet with the Honorable Bob."

He plunged out and down the stairs, eager to put some plan for the safe-keeping of Mrs. Brierly into effect.

He was stopped, however, ere he had gained a square's distance, by a loud call from behind. An office boy had plunged down the stairs and through the street after him, and was loudly calling him.

"Here, Fred! Fred! Hold your horses! You're wanted!"

"What's in the wind now?" asked Fred, reluctantly turning.

"Mr. Brace sent me after you with this. It's a telegram just in. Important, he says. Must be put through on the jump. Some of the older reporters would get it, but there's none of them in, and not a minute to lose."

Fred snatched the telegram with a very discontented look. He would have jumped at the chance a few days before, but just now he had other eggs in the pan. Mrs. Brierly might get into trouble while he was absent. He ran his eyes hastily over the scrawl.

"Out of the city. Why, it's a day's job, and no baby's play, either. And here comes a snow-storm. What did you run so fast for, you young imp? I ain't hungry after any such jobs."

"You don't want it?" exclaimed the surprised boy. "Why, I thought it would suit you better than jumbles and pound-cake. Want me to tell Mr. Brace that?"

"If you do, I'll run a case of type crossways down your throat. Of course I'm in for it. A chap can't growl, except he's got to apologize to the printer's devil. If you say beans to Mr. Brace, I'll set you up in boot-leather, now you bet."

Fred dashed away. He was angry and out of

sorts, and had half a mind to turn back and whale the boy for satisfaction.

"It'd only raise a howl in the office, though. You might think these boys were made of French china, they're so mighty tender of them. All I can do is to skeet down-town and put Mrs. Maloney on guard, and then off for this uncomfortable job."

A very short time brought him breathless to Mrs. Maloney's door. That good lady was luckily at home, and listened with growing excitement to the young reporter's hurried explanations.

"Is it a rapparee of a thafe-catcher, thin?" she angrily inquired. "Faix but he'll find Kitty Maloney at home. And wid hot water on the stove, too. And it's afther that purty lady wid the baby they are, indade? You kin thrust me now, Misther Fred. Sure an' I've dealt wid the loikes of them bog-trotters afore."

"But don't breathe a word to Mrs. Brierly. She'll be scared into a mummy if she knows they're after her."

"Divil the word'll I breathe, at all, at all. There's not a swater lady in the whole country nor that same, and it's not meself that would iver lift a hand to trouble her. Yo kin safely pave it all wid Kitty Maloney, me boy."

Fred departed, not quite satisfied in mind. He had every confidence in Mrs. Maloney's good intentions, but was not so sure of her good judgment.

CHAPTER X.

THROUGH NIGHT AND STORM.

THE snow was falling rapidly when Fred entered, at a quick run, the West Philadelphia depot of the Pennsylvania R. R. He was out of breath with haste, and came panting into the station. He had bought a ticket and was hurrying to the train, when a voice accosted him.

"Hey, Fred! Where have you been? I have waited here this half-hour for you."

It was Mr. Brace, chief editor of the *Star*.

"Been prospecting," cried Fred, in reply. "Plenty of time. Got a good five minutes to spare. Want me, Mr. Brace?"

"Yes. I sent for you to come back into the office. Why didn't you?"

"First I heard of it," answered Fred. "That type-monkey never said a word. Handed me the telegram and told me to slide. Best grind him up into printers' ink. That's all he's good for. What's wrong, Mr. Brace?"

"Come here a moment. I want a word with you."

He led Fred out of the throng of passengers who were hurrying to the train.

"This is an important job," began the editor. "Too heavy for one so young as you. I would take it myself, but haven't the time. I want you to be on your mettle, Fred."

"Just post me on what's to be done, and count on me doing it. If it's in the wind I'll put it through."

"Cameron is to speak at Lancaster to-night. A very important speech. It's the trump-card of the campaign. He's to outline the party programme for the next election. It's the heavy gun of the year, my lad. The first move in the presidential game. Every paper has its reporter out, and every one will try his best to be first in. I want you to keep up the honor of the *Star*. It will be a feather in your cap if we get our extras out in advance. Do you understand?"

Fred looked up into his face with keen intelligence. His eyes sparkled with animation. Here was a prime chance for a dash, and a dash was just to his fancy.

"Cost don't count, eh?" he queried. "Suppose I want to buy up a railroad train, or some little trifle of that sort? Or to charter a telegraph company?"

"Here's for you," answered Mr. Brace, with a laugh, as he gave the boy a roll of notes. "Don't let the *Star* be discounted, Fred. Get the wires first, if it empties your pocket."

"Ay, ay," answered Fred, cheerily. "There's the train-bell. I've got to streak. There are some sharp chaps on the other papers, Mr. Brace, and I'm only a green one. You won't blame me if I get left?"

"No, no. But do your best."

"Bet I wake them up, anyhow. They won't leave Fred Flyer easy. Good-by, Mr. Brace. Here goes for the sport."

Fred was off like a shot as the last tap of the bell sounded. The train had already started when he reached the platform, but he sprang

onto a car with the agility of a monkey. In a minute more they were going too fast for even a monkey to have mounted.

Night was rapidly approaching as the train rolled out into the free air, and darted away through the outskirts of the city toward the open country. It promised to be a wild night. The snow which had been falling all the afternoon now came down heavier than ever. The ground was covered with a thick carpet of white, over which howled a chilling breeze that lifted the fallen snow into eddying whirls. Rain and sleet began to mingle with it, freezing as it fell. All was dreary and desolate. The passengers shuddered as they looked out into the storm.

"Hope we won't get stalled," cried one. "It's just the night to fill up cuts. There'll be no fun if the engine rams her nose into a snow-bank, and lays us up for all night on the road."

"I hope to Moses it won't," answered his companion. "I've got to reach Lancaster in time for the meeting."

"Faith, I'm as anxious as yourself. But it's one thing to make up your mind, and another thing to do your work."

Fred looked around at the speakers. It was as he suspected. He saw a pair of his rival reporters, out on the same errand as himself.

"It's cut and go," he muttered. "If I get left it won't be for doing my best."

Onward rattled the train. Over broad levels, along lofty embankments through deep ravines, over high bridges, with frozen streams far beneath, now in a wild stretch of country, now thundering through a half-sleeping village, now storming into a bustling town, on and on it went, whistling defiance to the storm, and breaking with its red eye through the gathering gloom like some living dragon, the lord of the tempest.

And everywhere spread the fleecy carpet of the snow. Each tree looked like a white ghost. The ground was deeply sheeted. Every bit of woodland was foliaged with snow wreaths. It seemed, through the growing gloom, as if a thousand specters were abroad. Still the snow came down in whirling eddies. Still the train ran madly on through the night.

"Somehow I've a notion there's fun ahead," said Fred to himself. "The nimblest 'possum is going to get the persimmon. It's dash and go, sure pop."

The hours moved on. Night came down thick and heavy. The train should have reached Lancaster by seven o'clock. Yet, forced to move slowly by the storm it was still fifteen miles out when the hour of seven passed.

The obstruction to the road grew heavier. The engine vigorously forced her way onward. At half-past seven they had still five miles to go.

"We're good for the meeting anyhow," said one of the reporters. "It calls at eight. We'll be in within fifteen minutes."

"And ten minutes from the depot will take us to the hall."

"There's nothing like a locomotive for—"

The sentence was never finished. For at that moment there came a heavy surge that sent the passengers plunging forward in their seats. The train came to a sudden stop, and the cars clashed together with a thundering report.

"What's the matter?" "Something's busted."

"Look out, folks." "Butted into another train."

"Mercy on us, I've smashed my nose!"

Such were some of the medley of exclamations that arose. The brakeman, who now opened the car door, was assailed by a torrent of questions from the alarmed passengers.

"Don't be frightened," he remarked, coolly. "It's nothing. A mere trifle. It will be all right in a minute."

"That's nothing, eh?" exclaimed an angry passenger. "I'd like to know what you call something. There's nothing like taking it cool, hang me if there is."

"Only a snow-pile," rejoined the brakeman.

"The locomotive has rammed her nose into the snow. She'll go through it, you can bet on her."

"I am not so sure of that," exclaimed one of the reporters, as he sprang up and rushed for the car door. "It isn't the first time I've seen an engine stalled in a snow-heap. Don't tell me about her going through."

He was followed closely by his companion. Other passengers also rushed to the door, Fred one of the foremost.

It was a decided change of conditions to rush out of the well-warmed and comfortable car into the raging storm. The locomotive was a picture to behold when they had made their way to her through the drifts. Covered with

thick wreaths of snow till she seemed like a white monster, and half buried in the deep drifts into which she had plunged, she seemed utterly lost and vanquished.

The steam hissed spitefully from the open safety-valve. In the cab stood the engineer, a grimy, stout-limbed man, with stern, resolute face, eying the drift with a look of fierce determination.

The engine had backed out with some difficulty. She now ran a hundred yards back, and came plunging forward again, with all steam on. Once more she plunged into the cut. The heaped-up snow flew in blinding swirls through the air. Into its mass bored the heavy iron monster, like a ball from some huge gun. Some fifteen feet deeper than before; and then she came to a second halt, this time almost buried in the drift.

"It's all up," remarked the reporter to his companion. "Every plunge only packs the snow harder. That train is laid up for the night."

"What's to be done, then?"

"There's a village off here to the left. You can see its lights. We can hire a sleigh there, and get in yet in time for the pith of the speech."

"A good thought. Come on. Every minute counts now."

They waded off across the snow-clad field toward the village. Fred had overheard this conversation, and for a moment felt inclined to follow them.

He looked at the face of the engineer. There was no flinch in those steel-blue eyes. Fred concluded to wait.

"What's the show?" he asked. "Ain't going to back down, are you?"

"Not much," answered the engineer, grimly. "Got business on the other side. I'm going through if the machine holds together. Stand back, everybody!"

The baffled engine slowly drew herself out of the snowy mass. This time she ran back for a quarter of a mile, uncoupling from the train. Many of the passengers had landed, and were standing on each side of the rails, as she again came up, with screaming whistle, and short, angry puffs from her smoke-stack.

She was moving with immense speed. Once more she struck the hardened snow-bank, with a whip-like crack. Onward she went, pushing it before her, plunging deeper and deeper, sending the snow flying in blinding clouds. Every instant her speed decreased. Soon she came to a dead stop, ten feet in advance of her former resting-place.

"No use," declared the conductor, looking on with an experienced eye. "Give it up, Bill. You can't make it."

"Can't? Don't know any such word. Take that spade, Joe. We must dig down that packed wall, and the next break will take us to daylight."

The energetic fellow jumped down, spade in hand, followed by the fireman. The snow in front of the engine was packed to almost the hardness of ice. Yet the strong arms of the two vigorous men sent it flying. The brakemen rushed to their aid with other shovels. In ten minutes the dense wall was broken down. Only the soft snow lay before them.

"Clear the way now," cried the engineer, cheerily. "I am going through this time. Twenty feet more will do it. Up, Joe. There's not a bolt started. She's good for the job."

Off backed the engine again. And up again she came, like a shot from a catapult. The soft snow in front yielded. But it quickly packed. The speed rapidly decreased. The engine came nearly to a halt. But a wild cry of triumph came to the ears of the shivering passengers.

"Hurrah!" yelled the resolute engineer. "That jump did the work. Away we go. Bill Sprat don't stop for trifles. Hold your level, gentlemen till I bring up the train."

Within five minutes more the train stood in the cut, and the shivering passengers were crowding back into their warm seats in the cars.

"All aboard here," came the cry from car to car.

"Go ahead," commanded the conductor, in short, quick accents.

A screaming whistle from in front, and away they went, through the snowed-up cut that had threatened to end their journey for the night.

Within ten minutes more the train rolled into the station at Lancaster, the engine looking like a huge snow-ball, and engineer and fireman white to their eyebrows and whiskers.

It was nearly half past eight.

Fred jumped briskly to the ground, asked a

question or two from the bystanders, and plunged sharply away through the falling snow.

Within a few minutes he had gained the entrance to the hall where the lecture was being delivered. As he paused there for an instant the sound of approaching sleigh-bells came to his ears. Some distance down the street appeared a two-horse team furiously driven.

"It's our reporters, for a wager," laughed Fred, as he hurried into the hall. "Nip and tuck, but I beat them that time, and I'll beat them again. The *Star's* bound to come out, boss."

CHAPTER XI.

GETTING DOWN THE GREAT ORATION.

It was a wide, large hall, well filled with a deeply interested audience, into which Fred entered. The broad, solid and heavy countenances of many of the hearers were those of the Pennsylvania Germans, of whose settlements Lancaster is one of the centers.

But it was solid good sense that showed in their faces. They were not the men to be taken in by flowery language. They wanted hard facts, and all fine elocution was likely to be wasted.

On the platform was a group of political worthies, as one could see at a glance. The genuine politician is not easily mistaken. He carries his signature upon his face. The orator of the evening was already deep in the merits of his subject. Fred listened for a moment, and then nodded his head approvingly.

"All right so far," he said to himself. "Only the skirmish line out. Hasn't brought up the heavy guns yet. Plenty of time to take in the merits of the argument."

He looked around for a suitable seat. It was too late now to hunt the reporter's table, and he must take his chances. At this moment the two other reporters came in, flushed and hurried, their faces full of anxiety, and their noses red with the pinch of the cold air.

Fred laughed slyly as he found a desirable seat, laid his open note-book on the crown of his hat, and took a well-sharpened pencil from his pocket.

At the reporters' table near the front of the hall several of the fraternity were seated, actively taking down the oration.

"Out in force," Fred muttered. "Come in an early train, I judge. Bet they don't beat me on the home-track. Ah! there he goes in for the heavy bits."

His pencil was immediately busy, taking down the words that fell from the lips of the speaker.

Fred was an expert short-hand writer, and his work was a series of dots, dashes and complicated lines, that meant nothing to a soul but himself, but which he could read off like print.

"What kind o' queer writin' do ye call that?" whispered a curious neighbor. "Looks like the switch of a cat's tail that's been dipped in an ink-bottle."

"Phonography," answered Fred, shortly.

"Funnygraphy! Waal, I swow to gracious! Never'd have thought it. Ain't seen nothin' so funny in my born days."

"Dry up," growled Fred, sourly. "One's enough to talk at a time."

The curious countryman subsided, though he could not keep his eyes off of Fred's pencil. Of what it all meant he had not the remotest idea. It looked to his rural soul like some magic formula. He looked slyly down to Fred's feet to see if there were any signs of hoofs. It seemed to his simple fancy that there must be something diabolical in such a style of handwriting.

On went the speaker, working himself up into a hot excitement, gesticulating wildly, and laying down his idea of the political programme in the plainest language.

He was not talking to the stolid citizens of Lancaster. They were only a foil to his true audience. He was talking to the State of Pennsylvania. His words were meant for those keen-faced men with pencils, who were catching his language as it fell from his lips, as the photograph plate catches the lines of the sitter's face. He knew well that his words would be sown broadcast throughout the State during the next day in the pages of thousands of newspapers, and now was the chance to make his mark. In these days a false move in the game of politics, as in the game of chess, cannot be taken back. A speaker's words are spread too far abroad to be recalled.

"And now, my fellow-citizens of this time-honored city," went on the speaker—"worthy sons of brave old Lancaster, I must bring this

long address to a close. I may have wearied you with my prolix arguments and far-fetched deductions, but—"

"Taffy," said Fred to himself, as he closed his note-book with a snap. "He's had his talk out, and now he's going to tickle their brains a bit. Don't want none of that. I've got down the meat, and guess I won't wait for the mustard. Spry's the word now—touch and go."

Leaving his seat, he slid quietly out of the hall. Not so quietly, however, but that his movement was observed by some of the other reporters. His keen and fresh young face was known to the most of them. The two who had last entered whispered to one another:

"There goes that young hornet of the *Star*. The spry little hound will discount us if we aren't lively as crickets. Our sleigh's at the door yet."

"Then let's make for it. The speech is on its last legs. Slide's the word."

In a moment they had left the hall, and were rushing to the point at which they had left their sleigh. To their surprise it had disappeared. They looked anxiously around. There, a hundred paces down the street, was their lost team, going at an easy canter in the opposite direction to the station.

"It's that young imp's work," cried one of the baffled reporters. "After the dashed team! We can catch it yet."

Away they flew along the snowy pavement. It was indeed Fred's work. He had loosened the horses, and started them at a trot down the street, while he ran at full speed in the opposite direction.

In a few minutes he dashed breathlessly into the station, and made his way hastily to the telegraph office.

"Where's the operator?" he cried. "Quick! I've got some lively work in hand."

The operator, who had been half-asleep, came yawning and rubbing his eyes to the window.

"Want me?" he asked, drowsily.

"Bet I do," cried Fred. "Spry's the word. Dispatch for the *Morning Star*. The Cameron speech. Must be put through at break-neck speed. I preempt these wires till the job's done."

"Can't be did," answered the drowsy operator. "Sorry for you young man, but it ain't in the wood."

"What's the reason it isn't?" cried Fred, sharply and angrily. "See here, boss, maybe you don't know who I am. Best dip your head in a water-bucket, and wake yourself up. Come, stir up. I claim the wires ahead of any other reporter."

"Nary time," answered the operator. "Couldn't send a word if I got a dollar a letter."

"What's the reason you couldn't?" asked Fred, fiercely.

"Because we haven't a wire left," answered the stolid operator. "Every one of them's down. Sleet and freeze is the Old Nick on the telegraph. Every wire is broken, and we couldn't get a word through for an emperor."

Two men stood behind Fred listening to this conversation. They were his rival reporters, who had dashed up to the station in their sleigh a minute before. They now slyly drew back, leaving Fred to finish his confab with the easy-going operator.

"No use talking," continued the latter. "If you've anything to go through, you'll have to take it. No chance to wire."

The young reporter rubbed his brow in a vexed manner.

"When can I get through?" he asked.

"What's the next train time?"

"Two o'clock in the morning. Get you in the city by four or five."

"Or seven, maybe, with these roads," answered Fred, discontentedly.

"Can't be helped, young man. If you're in such a hurry, you'd best charter a train. You can find an extra locomotive and a passenger car out here."

"By Jove, I will!" cried Fred, briskly, as he turned on his heel. "It's a good suggestion. This report must get in the morning edition if it costs a gold mine."

As he moved away several other men hurried into the station, and bustled excitedly up to the telegraph office. They were the remaining reporters who had waited for the finish of the oration.

Fred laughed slyly as he noticed their excited haste.

"Sold!" was his single comment.

He hurried away in search of the station-master. But that personage was not easily to

be found. He had gone out with two gentlemen, Fred was told. Likely to wet his whistle. The disappointed lad hunted around for five minutes, vainly seeking the vanished official.

"Hang me, if I call this business!" he growled. "Got a big notion to report that chap. Hillo! what's this?"

He had heard the hissing of steam. Hurrying in the direction of the sound, he discovered a locomotive on the track, from whose smoke-stack a cloud of black smoke was rolling. The engineer was busily oiling the joints of the engine.

"What's in the wind?" asked Fred.

"Steam down. Firing up."

"What for?"

"For a run to Philadelphia. Special charter, hang it! 'Tain't a night for a dog to be out."

Fred started back amazed. What did this mean?

"Special charter?" he repeated.

"Jist so. Two reporters. Telegraph wires down, and they're going in by rail. Neat game. All the other reporters sold. Hang 'em, I'd like to give 'em a pitch over a bank for pulling me out on such a night."

Fred stood half-stunned for the moment. He then burst into a wild laugh. He had been victimized, but he could not help enjoying the sharp operation of his rival reporters.

As he stood looking on at the operations of the engineer, the remaining reporters came hurrying anxiously up. There was a look of utter disgust on their faces. They had had Fred's luck at the telegraph-office, and had just learned of the chartering of the only engine in the station. They stood looking on in vexed indignation, which was not lessened when the two successful reporters walked up, in company with the station-master.

They were contentedly smoking, and their faces wore an expression of malicious amusement, as they looked at their disappointed competitors.

"Oh, come, Jones!" cried one of these. "This is too thin. You two chaps can't fill a car. Let us make a club of it. We'll all bear our share of the tariff, and go in like a jolly crew altogether."

"Not much," answered Jones, with a laugh. "We don't want company."

"But you'll find it deuced lonely," remarked a second. "I've got a deck of cards here. Come, we can kill time with cut-throat eucher."

"That cat won't jump," laughed the reporter, as he sent a cloud of smoke curling from his lips. "We want to be alone, to reflect on our sins. Couldn't think of indulging in such wickedness as eucher. The night mail will be along at two o'clock, sharp. Best keep cool. We'd wait ourselves, only we're in something of a hurry."

"You're a confounded disoblighing pair of sharps, that's all I've got to say for you," was the angry reply. "I wouldn't give a cent for a sugar kettle full of such men."

The only reply was an irritating laugh from the successful reporters.

Fred had vanished. A thought had come to his mind and he had hurried away. A few minutes more passed by. Steam was hissing sharply from the escape valve of the engine.

"Come, gentlemen," said the station-master. "Steam's up. You'd best be off."

"Sorry we can't take you along," said Jones, as he followed his comrade into the car. "But it won't do to take on any extra weight. Every pound counts."

The baffled reporters stood in growling discontent on the platform, half-disposed to take the car by storm.

The engineer mounted into his cab. His eyes dilated as he saw a youthful figure seated in a dark corner, and quietly smoking as if a cigar was his one aim in life.

"Heh!" exclaimed the engineer. "What the deuce is that?"

"Hist!" warned Fred, for it was he. "Drop that. I'll explain."

"What's the matter, Joe?" called the station-master.

"Pinched my finger, that's all."

He turned to Fred with a look of inquiry.

"Come, little one."

"Thought maybe you'd like a smoke," remarked Fred, handing a cigar.

"I don't smoke that. Slide, now. No time for fooling."

"Take your cigar, anyhow. It's a hard night."

The engineer took the cigar. It was wrapped up in paper. He looked at it suspiciously.

"I don't smoke cigarettes," he said.

"Take the cover off, then."

The hissing of the steam drowned this conversation. The engineer did as directed. His eyes opened with surprise. The green back of a five-dollar bill appeared.

"I've got more of the same kind," remarked Fred, tapping his pocket significantly.

"What are you fooling about, Joe?"

"Off we go," answered the engineer.

The fireman jumped aboard. The wheel began to turn. Away rolled the special train, with two passengers in its single car, and a third one, stealing his passage, in the engine cab.

CHAPTER XII.

A WILD RIDE IN A WILD NIGHT.

THE night was wilder than ever. Down came the snow in a swirling cloud, caught by the wild wind, and hurled in white eddies through the air. The engine-cab gave little protection. Snow-flakes came whirling and tossing in till they found every empty corner of the open space.

The night was dimly dark. They seemed to be plunging into a black abyss. Onward rushed the engine, puffing and snorting like a living thing, pouring out dense volumes of smoke, ever and anon sending out a wild scream from its steam-whistle, as a warning to all careless wayfarers.

It was a fearful ride. The whirling snow, the howling wind, the throbbing and hissing engine, the black face of the night, the mad plunge onward, the cold blast that cut like a knife, the shivering sense that at any instant they might be hurled to destruction, all combined to give a sense of intense excitement to the scene.

Fred looked up into the face of the engineer, set, impassive, determined, his eyes looking forward into the night with a glance that seemed to pierce the darkness.

"No back-down there," he said to himself. "That chap's got back-bone enough for an elephant. If we go down, we'll all go in a heap together."

The fireman, a tall, lank fellow, with an oddly screwed-up countenance, looked significantly at Fred.

"That smokes like a good cigar," he remarked with a queer laugh, as he pointed to the engineer. "Got another of the same pattern? Guess I'd like a cigarette of that style."

There was no mistaking his meaning. Fred, with a sigh of regret, handed out another cigar wrapped in a five-dollar bill.

"A thundering dear passage for all the room I take up," he growled. "A chap could go through to Pittsburg in a palace-car for the money."

"Special charter, young man," returned the fireman. "There's them would give a fifty for the privilege of an engine ride in a sweet night like this."

"It's a jolly lunkhead that would do it, that's my sentiments," answered Fred, shrugging his shoulders significantly. "A high old privilege! It's fun, though; and I'm ripe for fun. Pelt on, boys; what you can stand, I can. But if this old critter plugs up, I guess we'll go on by telegraph."

He had hardly spoken, when the speed of the engine was checked so suddenly as to throw them all forward. She struggled violently onward, while the steam rushed in torrents from the safety-valve. They had struck the cut which had caused trouble that night before. It was partly filled up again with the drifting snow.

"Once, twice, and away!" cried the engineer, cheerily, as they began to gain new speed. "Through and off. Knowed old Ironsides would do it. The old hoss ain't easy stopped."

"More cuts between here and the city, aren't there?" asked Fred, quietly.

"Reckon so. Some deep ones, too. Chance if we get through. But if it's in the pith of steam and iron, we'll do it. Don't let no trifles stop me when I'm on a special."

Onward they rushed. It was impossible, however, to keep up the speed with which they had made the first open reach. The track at many points was covered deep with snow. Even where clear, a skin of frozen sleet covered them. The wheels would not half hold. Their speed became checked. The engine did her best, and the engineer set his teeth with an energy that meant business, but in spite of all this, twenty miles an hour was their best figure, and often not more than ten.

"Blast the weather!" growled Joe, between his teeth. "I wasn't never born to creep like a snail. Why, we'll be gray as badgers afore we reach the city. Been half a lifetime out now, and ain't made more nor twenty mile."

"I'm gray now," laughed Fred as he dashed the frozen snow from his hair. "Anyhow I've

got the start of the two coons back yonder. A car-length ahead. Wouldn't they be ripping if they knew I was here!"

"Don't let that cat out," warned Joe. "It mought hurt us. Let 'em guess till they're blind, but don't sell the trick."

"All right," laughed Fred. "I might say I came through the air, like an old witch on her broomstick. Hey! that was a narrow squeak."

They had just dashed through another short cut, sending the drift flying wildly before them.

"Fire up, Tim," cried the engineer. "Keep her boiling."

Tim threw open the furnace door. The red glow of the raging blaze within fell in lurid light on their faces, blinding them with its glare. The snow-flakes looked like blood-drops in its red gleam. Shovel after shovel of coals were flung into the gaping maw of the devouring furnace, like so much meat for the fiery dragon within. Then the furnace door was shut with a loud clank.

"There's meat for another twenty miles," remarked the fireman, as he leaped on his shovel.

"I'm afeard we'll not sleep in a Christian bed to-night, Joe."

"Dunno," answered Joe, shortly. "We've run through the storm. That's all drift snow now. It's stopped falling. Moughtn't be so bad nearer the city."

Fred rose, straightened his half-frozen limbs, and looked out into the night. The air was still full of snow. He could see no sign that it had ceased falling. So far as his experience went it was coming down as heavy as ever.

Onward still through night and storm. The lights of way-stations gleamed for a moment as they shot past. Sleeping villages were gone through with a whirl. Half-halting they went through larger towns, where a light here and there showed that some of the inmates were still awake. Curious faces gazed on them in surprise. No train was looked for at that hour.

"How goes it?" yelled Joe from the engine.

"Track clear ahead?"

"Ay, ay," came in faint tones already left behind.

Midnight passed. One o'clock. Half-past one. The night was going by. The keen-eyed engineer looked out with a glance that pierced the gloom.

"Twenty miles to make yet," he said, with a satisfied nod. "An hour more will fetch us to the depot."

"Except there's a knot in the rope," answered the fireman.

"Stop your croaking, old crow. Don't want no cold water now."

"What's the show for a clear track?" asked Fred. "The snow's all over, and there's not much drifting. We ought to get through."

"Doubtful," answered the fireman. "There's a heavy cut yet to wade. If it's snowed up Old Sam hisself wouldn't go through."

Fred dropped back in silence. If he didn't go through, his rivals wouldn't. That was one thing sure. The rattling wheels of the engine told of new miles falling behind them. The bright light of a signal station shone on her, as on a white specter dashing through the night.

"What's the signal, Joe?" asked the fireman. "Isn't it set for danger?"

"Clear track ahead. Nary danger."

Two o'clock. The clouds had broken. A wild storm-rack yet hung in the sky, but the light of a full moon shone through a cloud-opening, and let fall its clear rays on the snow-clad scene. Far as the eye could reach a white mask lay on the face of the fields. Hills and woods rose like white clumps from the broad level. It was a picture at once frightful and alluring. The eyes of the boy were fixed upon it with intense fascination. He had come through an experience that night such as had never fallen to his lot before.

"Grab on and hold tight," warned the engineer. "The cut's just ahead, and it's full of snow as an egg is of meat. Hang on like grim death. I'm going to make a jump for it. But it's mighty likely we'll be plugged up like a cork in a bottle."

With the valves wide open, and the steam rushing in full volume into the cylinders, the old Ironsides plunged onward, gaining speed at every revolution. Fred fixed himself with a death-grip, and strained his eyes ahead, striving to penetrate the gloom.

On they jumped. Then there came a check to their wild speed. The air was again full of flying snow. The escaping steam again hissed shrilly out into the dull night air. The massive engine struggled deeper and deeper into the snow-heap that filled the cut ten feet deep.

But her speed momentarily slackened. For a hundred feet she pushed on, and then came to a dead halt. She was two-thirds buried. As Joe said, she had pushed into the drift like a cork into the neck of a bottle.

"Hope the chaps behind ain't hurt," growled the fireman. "They must have got a fling. 'Tain't no fun to be brung up so sudden."

Fred looked into the face of the engineer. The latter shook his head in doubt.

"Can't be did," he said. "There's a good hundred yards more of it, and it's deeper as it goes on. We've done our best, but we ain't got the weight to go through."

"How far are we from the city?"

"About ten miles or thereaway."

Fred sat cogitating. A ten-mile walk through the snow, on a cold night. It was a shivering idea. But it was no time now to back down.

"Hist!" cried Joe. "Here comes our passengers to see what's busted. Drop down 't'her side, boy. Don't let 'em see you."

"Good-by!" exclaimed Fred. "I'm off for the city."

"Hold fast, you little hound! You can't do it. You'll be buried in the drift."

"I can try," answered Fred, resolutely.

He sprang from the cab, just as the two astonished passengers came wading up from the other side.

Fred waded back through the cut until he reached the open ground beyond. The snow here came almost to his knees on a level. A broad field lay before him, on which fell the light of the moon in clear radiance. Not far off the line of a high-road could be traced.

There was only one thing to be done. He waded on across the field. It was hard work to make his way through the depth of unbroken snow, but he soon gained the roadside.

A light here, that came from a house beside the road, had attracted him. Reaching the locality he was pleasantly surprised to see a two-horse sleigh geared up and standing before the house. It was a large, solid sleigh, filled with tin milk-cans.

The driver was already on his seat, reins in hand. A shout from Fred attracted his attention.

"Where away?"

"To the city. Got to start early to break this confounded snow. Who are you?"

"Come from a stalled train. Want a lift. Got to go through."

The milkman shook his head.

"Too much weight now on my horses. No room for passengers."

"How much profit is there on your load of milk?" asked Fred.

"Say five dollars."

"I'll make it a double-five. Here's your cash. Say the word."

"Good boy. Fork over. Jump in. My horses won't be stalled as easy as your locomotive."

The next minute Fred was off for the city, behind a peal of jingling sleigh-bells.

CHAPTER XIII.

A DOUBLE SURPRISE.

In the composing-room of the *Morning Star* a dozen men were sitting around chatting and smoking. They were the remnant of the force, editors, compositors, reporters and others of the employees, the remainder having finished their work and gone home.

Five o'clock sounded from a clock in the corner.

"Guess our night's work is done," said one of them, knocking the ashes from his pipe. "Might as well toddle home."

"That Lancaster item is snowed up, sure. Wires down and trains stalled."

"Good by. I'm off for a snooze."

Ere the speaker could reach the door, however, it was flung violently open, and a youthful figure sprang into the room. He was white with snow from his cap to his shoes, but it was the ardent face of Fred Flyer.

"Hurrah!" he yelled, flinging his cap into the air. "The *Star's* the winning horse! First into the judges' stand, and the rest floundering ten miles out! Stop the presses! All hands to work! New edition! Here's the great Cameron speech! A good two hours ahead of the best of them!"

The man with the pipe rushed up and seized the excited boy by the arm, shaking him violently.

"Come down to sound sense, boy. What do you mean? Have you got it?"

"You bet! And discounted all the other reporters. Two of them snowed up, ten miles out. Lord knows where the rest are. Came

in at two-forty on a milk-can, behind a pair of spankers. Here's copy. Get down to the types. Quick as shooting. Every minute counts."

"Jolly boy," cried the editor, "you're worth your weight in gold. Jump down, Jack, and stop the presses. This item must come out in the first edition. Fling overboard all the papers printed. Lord, won't we have the laugh on the other papers! To your cases, my hearties! Where's your copy, Fred?"

"Here," answered the boy. "Some of it to write out yet, but there's enough to set them going."

He drew some penciled sheets from his pockets and distributed them among the eager type-setters, who flew to their cases. Within a minute the click of types could be heard, as they rapidly set up the matter handed them.

"Here, some of you," continued the excited boy. "Pen and ink's the word. My hands are frozen to icicles. But my tongue isn't. I'll read my short-hand notes, if somebody will copy."

"Where did you make that other copy, Fred?"

"Driving in, behind them spankers in the milk sleigh. They came so rapid that their tails stood out just like boards. Wrote on them like a chap would write on a table."

"You lie, you young hound!"

"Then don't ask ridiculous questions when a fellow is in a hurry. Here, Bill Button, you're spry with the pen. Take this down."

Fred rapidly read off his notes to the penman, who took them down with wonderful rapidity. The sheets, as fast as finished, were passed over to the compositors.

The types flew in a steady stream into the composing-sticks. Everybody about the office was busy. The laziness of ten minutes before was exchanged for a restless activity.

In an incredibly short space of time the report of the speech was set up, and a proof-sheet was struck off. Flung into the hands of the proof-reader, the proof was read and corrected with lightning speed. Once more to the compositors. In less than half an hour from Fred's entry to the office, a clean copy was drawn, and the editor sung out:

"Spry, now. Knock out the first column of matter. It's all patch-work, anyhow. Put this in its place. Set the presses whirling quick as thunder. We'll be late on the street with our issue. But won't we set the other journals wild? Off, now. Don't lose a minute for an earthquake!"

Away they went, right and left. It was true Yankee grit and go.

"And now, my jolly young rooster, let's hear all about it," he continued, turning to Fred. "You must have had a night of it. Pelt out your story, boy, and let us off. We're clean done out with the night's work."

Fred leaned back luxuriously on a wooden box, with the bare wall for a cushion. It was as soft a sofa as he cared for. The others gathered curiously around, anxious to hear his story. He looked none the worse for his night's work, but was bright and brisk as a bird.

It was an exciting story he had to tell them, from his leaving the station at Philadelphia, to his return in the milkman's sleigh, breaking through roads from an inch to a foot deep in snow, and ending with a half-mile run along the city streets to the office.

"It was touch and go," he cried. "Left the *Press* and the *Times* shivering in a snow-drift. Cost them like thunder to hire a train. Wouldn't they be raging if they knew that the *Star* stole a passage? They can't nohow get in before day-break. We'll have the *Star* blazing with the news two hours ahead of the best of them. And the fun of it is they can't guess how it was done."

"Keep mum, everybody," cautioned the editor. "Let them stew. You're a brick, Fred. Won't forget you in a hard job again. And now, gentlemen, home's the word. I'm as sleepy as a porker after dinner."

Away they went, right, left, east and west, and Fred among them, making his way home after his hard night's work.

And away down-stairs in the *Star* office, below the composing-rooms, below the editorial dens, below the distributing-offices, below the ground floor, far away underground, throbbed and clanked the busy presses, working off at enormous speed the day's issue, and tossing the wet sheets, full of the news of the world, like the flakes of a snow-storm from its iron jaws.

Within a half-hour more Fred was home, safe in his bed, snoring away, and off in the land of visions through snow-drifts fifty feet

deep, and in locomotives as big as mountains, which hurled the snows before them like vol-canoes.

Again, he found himself in a mammoth printing office, where a hundred type-setters were busy setting up political speeches fifty fathoms long, while a regiment of reporters were assailing the office, eager to recover the news that had been stolen from them.

And then in the streets were five hundred newsboys, full of vim, yelling out the *Morning Star* at the top of their lungs, till the whole city rung with the chorus.

But this latter was not quite a dream. Fred's senses came back to him with a snap. And the first thing that sounded in his ears was the cry of a shrill-toned newsboy, screaming out in stentorian tones:

"Yere's yer *Morning Star*! Yere's yer *Star*! All the latest news! The great Cameron speech! Biggest thing out! Special to *Star*. Ain't in any other paper! Buy a *Star*, if you want all the news!"

Fred turned and rolled in his bed. His nap was not half out, but it was impossible to get to sleep again. He laughed to himself as he got up and dressed.

"Won't them coons of the *Press* and *Times* be raging? They can guess till they're blue. Won't never be able to tell how it was done."

It was broad daylight when he came down-stairs. His mother was bustling about, preparing breakfast. Around her was a group of the young fry constantly in her way. In the corner sat his father, smoking his usual morning pipe.

"Where been, Fred?" he asked. "Making a night of it, boy? Wild night for human folks to be abroad in."

"Newspaper business," answered Fred. "Breakfast soon be ready, mother! I've got to be off."

"Hungry, Fred?"

"Hungry as a mouse."

"It will be ready in ten minutes."

"Put out, little bob-tail, for a *Star*," said Fred to his next younger brother. "That will tell all about it. Been sleighing, and railroad-ing, and wading, and having a jolly go, right through. All in the *Star*. Here I am, right side up with care. Got slap-jacks for breakfast, mother? You never seen a boy half as hungry."

"No nonsense, Fred. Where've you been?" cried the father, sharply.

"Up to Lancaster. Taking down the big Cameron speech. Busted through ten snow-drifts, but went through flying. There's the whole business in the *Star*." His younger brother rushed in with the paper. "Hand it over to your daddy. He wants the news."

Soon breakfast was on the table, and Fred satisfying an appetite that was simply ravenous.

In a few minutes, however, he was up again. Seizing his hat he ran briskly for the door, crying out:

"Tell you the whole story when I come back. Business before pleasure. Got to pitch in. A chap that's running a newspaper ain't got no time to spare."

It was but little after eight o'clock in the morning. His course took him to Market street, out which he turned toward the Schuylkill.

At the same moment a Market street car was coming toward him from the opposite direction. It contained but two passengers, who were lol-ing lazily on the cushions, apparently the worse for wear. They were the two reporters whom Fred had so neatly done.

"Hal!" cried one of them, suddenly starting bolt upright, with a face as long as a broom-stick. "What's that? Do you hear that?"

"It's some confounded nonsense," exclaimed the other, looking as startled as his companion.

The cause of this sudden movement was the cry of a newsboy, who was busily bawling out:

"*Morning Star*! Great Cameron speech! Head of all the papers! *Morning Star*!"

"It's a lie," growled the *Press* reporter. "Made up in the office. We're first in. Take the starch out of that when the correct speech comes on."

His companion grasped his arm and pointed out the car window. He was too full of emotion to speak. There, before their eyes, was Fred Flyer, walking gayly along the pavement.

The next instant the baffled reporters were plunging out of the car. Fred found himself suddenly confronted by a pair of excited men.

"What does this mean? How did you get here? What confounded lie is the *Star* putting out?"

"Hillo!" cried Fred. "Good-morning, gentlemen. Just in? Where have you been all night? Why, the *Star's* on the street these two hours. And if you don't believe it's square, just buy a copy and try."

"How did you get here, I say?" exclaimed the *Times* reporter, angrily. He looked as if he could hardly keep his hands off the cool boy.

"Come by lightning express," answered Fred. "Beats your special trains all hollow. Best try it yourself next time. Good-day. They're waiting for the news at your offices."

Fred walked briskly on, laughing at their discomfiture.

"We'll be even with you for this, you young rooster," yelled one of the reporters, in a rage.

"Ta, ta!" laughed Fred. "Keep your tempers, gentlemen. Better luck next time."

In a half-hour afterward he was at Kitty Maloney's door. That good lady opened the door at his knock. There came a strange expression on her face when she caught sight of her visitor.

"How's Mrs. Brierly and the baby?" he asked. "Dropped down to see them."

"Faix, an' I'm hardly able to tell—" she began.

"Tell what?"

"It's gone they are, and that's the Gospel truth."

"Gone? Gone where? What do you mean?"

"Clane stole away," answered Kitty, disconsolately. "That thafo of the world, that detective, came here wid a search-warrant, and where they are I know no more nor the babe unborn. But, faix, it's not here you nade be lookin' for 'em."

CHAPTER XIV.

FRED ON THE RAMPAGE.

If there ever was a case of a young man in a stew, it was Fred Flyer on receiving this astounding intelligence. He stood staring stupidly at Mrs. Maloney, with eyes and mouth wide open, completely taken aback.

"Gone!" he repeated.

"Clane gone! Ain't left the track of her purty fut an the floor. The swate crayther as she was too, wirra!"

"Then may I be keel-hauled and top-lifted, if you ain't the neatest specimen of an Irish booby that ever— You let them carry her off? You? With ten fingers and a tongue to fight with? And I thought it was as good as a regiment of soldiers to give her to your care! Oh! Kitty Maloney, and is that the kind of a woman you are?"

Fred had found his tongue again in good earnest. He was white with spleen and indignation as he thus gave the good lady a piece of his mind.

"Arrah now, an' don't be talkin' that way," she ejaculated. "Faix, an' didn't I go at 'em, teeth an' nail? But what was a poor lone woman to do ag'in' a couple o' stout rapscallions that cared no more for my blather nor they'd minded the hum of a honey-bee? An' the poor crayther got skeert, or she needn't ha' gone a step wid them, as I told her. She was as white as a pan o' buttermilk, the swate soul!"

"Did you follow them? Where did they take her to?"

"Is it me folly them? And me wid my hands in the suds? And a big washin' forninst, as had to be done afore dark that blessed night? Faix, an' it's the quare ideas boys do be gettin' intil their heads."

"That's enough, Mrs. Maloney," cried Fred, angrily. "We both might as well save our breath. But the next time I have a mouse to hide it won't go in your cage, that's all."

He walked away, fuming with anger. But Mrs. Maloney was not to be cheated out of the last word in an argument.

"Indade, an' it's little thanks I'm gettin' for me trouble," she called after him. "An' I might ha' known it, too, for it's his mother's blood over and over again. Haven't I slaved and slaved for that woman, and what did I iver get for it all, 'cept the thrille of dirty cash? Who'd ha' thought I'd iver have to take impudence from her boy, as I've had on my knee when he was a chit no bigger nor a rabbit?"

Fred walked on while the sound of Mrs. Maloney's voice followed him till he was quite beyond hearing. He was thoroughly nonplused. What to do he knew not. Many persons might have settled it by giving up the case, and letting Mrs. Brierly get herself out of the difficulty into which she had fallen. But Fred was not that sort of a boy. He had taken a strong fancy for the poor lady, whom he deeply pitied. As for

her brutal husband, he hated him like poison. He was thoroughly determined not to give up while the ghost of a chance remained.

Yet, where was she, and what was he to do? These were questions not easy to answer. As for searching the city at random for a hidden woman, he might as well search a bee-hive for a lost bee. Some other measures must be taken.

Swallowing his anger, he returned to Mrs. Maloney, and got from her a description of the parties who had carried off her boarder. It was as he expected. One of them answered to the ferry-boat detective. Fred put himself on the lookout for this individual.

A week or two passed away. Fred's newspaper items referred to matters and things about the wharves, for he was continually lurking there, on the watch for the suspected officer.

This vigilance was not entirely without effect. He succeeded in tracing him to the hospital, of which Mr. Brierly was still an inmate.

"After his blood-money," said Fred to himself. "A dirty dog he is anyhow. He knows he is throwing a blue-bird into the claws of a vulture, but it is little to him so he gets his ugly dollars. I hope the bread he buys with them will choke him."

An officer of the institution passed by, whom Fred buttonholed.

"Excuse me," he said, "but I'm after an item for the *Morning Star*. How about the wounded in the Camden railway accident? I should like to know how they are coming on."

"Mostly cured and discharged," answered the officer. "Some of them taken away by their friends. Two of them dead and discharged. Benton and Price. Poor devils, Benton had no friends. He went to the dissecting-room. Got his skeleton now in the museum. Ought to send it as a present to the railroad company, to set up in their office."

"How about the others?"

"Dorsey has a strained back. Will never be worth a fig again. A poor creature of a woman, Mrs. Lamson, has lost her arm to the elbow. The company will have to pension her."

"And the Western politician! The Honorable Bob Brierly, with a broken leg?"

"Doing prime. The bones have knit nicely. Will be on his pegs in a couple of weeks more. Will be glad to get rid of that customer."

"Why?"

"You never heard anybody that can match him in swearing. He keeps everything blue around him. Anything more?"

"That will do. Much obliged."

"Good-day." The official hurried off, bustling with business.

"Two weeks, eh?" soliloquized Fred. "Then Mrs. Brierly is safe for that time. She'll only be kept in quod till he's able to get at her. The Honorable Bob is my game. That detective is too sharp to be trapped. But I calculate an Eastern reporter ought to be able to run down a Western politician. He might fling me; but he's got to be up early in the morning."

He was not the boy, however, to leave a stone unturned. He kept an eye on the detective during the two weeks while waiting for Mr. Brierly's convalescence. But that gentleman seemed to be done with the job. He kept steadily at his post on the ferry-slip.

The two weeks of probation quickly passed. Fred presented himself again at the hospital.

"How goes Bob Brierly? Ready to stomp abroad yet?"

"He might go, but the leg isn't safe yet. He will have to stay another week in the ward."

Fred walked away a little out of temper. Brierly's leg in fact had healed with great rapidity, but the impatient boy was half inclined to think that he was holding back the cure just to spite him. He was not used to the discipline of waiting.

Faithfully, that day week, he presented himself again.

"Bob Brierly?" answered the gate-keeper, in response to his question. "You seem to be interested in that gentleman?"

"I am, considerably."

"He's gone."

"Gone?"

"Yes. We couldn't hold him. Got lively enough to stomp about, and sent for a carriage and drove off two days ago. A mighty good riddance. He was trouble enough for six of his size."

"Rode off? The deuce! Where to?"

"To Jericho, for aught I know."

Here was a pretty pickle of fish. After all

his vigilance Fred was checkmated. He was not used to swearing; but he would have given a week's salary, just then, for somebody to swear for him. It was a confoundedly awkward predicament to be in.

What was to be done? Mr. Brierly must be found by hook or crook. Fred searched the record-book of every hotel, from the largest to the smallest, but in vain. The Honorable Bob had not registered himself at any of them.

It was possible that he might have taken an assumed name, but that was not likely. Western Honorables want it known when they are on their travels. Fred investigated the guests of the hotels, however, but the face of his game did not appear.

He next sought the carriage that had taken him off. It was not to be found. It was simply a passing cab that had been hailed.

There was but one plan left. He made himself familiar at the political clubs and headquarters, with the hope of nailing his prey among the politicians. This, too, proved useless. Bob Brierly had utterly disappeared.

It was a decidedly disagreeable situation. Fred was not used to being distanced, and it did not improve his impatient temper. He growled and grumbled, and made things disagreeable for the young folks at home, until his father took up the battle in their defense.

"Look here, you grumbling young bear!" roared Mr. Flyer. "I'd like to know who's boss of this shanty, you or me? You've been raising Cain now among the young ones for a week, and I'll be fiddled if I stand any more of it. You can go down and whistle blue lightning among the types till you're tired, but you can't turn this house into a bear-pit while I'm about. Do you hear that?"

Fred subsided. When his father got on his mettle he meant business. He took the wise advice given him, and made for the printing-office. Here he seated himself on a crippled hand-press, and gloomily watched the typesetters, as they nimbly flung the news into their composing-sticks.

Fred sat dismally cogitating. He hated to be beaten. Yet a week had passed since Brierly left the hospital, and not the slightest trace of him could be found. Where was the poor wife, and what desperate strait might she not be in?

Suddenly Fred straightened himself up. An idea had shot into his mind. There might be a way of stirring up the lost runaway. Bob Brierly was a politician. He would want to see the papers, and particularly the *Morning Star*, which was the organ of his party. He might be reached through the paper.

"Just the thing!" cried Fred, slapping his knee. "If Mr. Brace will let me put it in I bet I sting the Honorable Bob. It's the only way to fetch him out of his nest. And Mr. Brace will do it if I tell him the whole story."

Fred sought the chief editor, and explained to him his wishes. Mr. Brace shook his head.

"It won't do, my boy. What do you want to pitch into him for? You had one squib in the paper about that gentleman, and he sent us a furious letter from the hospital. If you put in what you want now he will be here with club or revolver, to cudgel or shoot the editor."

"Think he will?" asked Fred, delightedly.

"I am sure of it."

"But that's just what I want. He is in hiding now, and can't be found. I want to fetch him out of his hole. Smoke him out like they smoke out rats."

"That's very nice for you, but how will it be for the editor? Do you fancy I want a visit from a Western rough?"

"Best build a battery of ten-pounders at the head of the stairs," laughed Fred. "Or toss him out of the editorial window. It's a good twenty-foot tumble. That will take the fight out of Mr. Brierly."

"See here, boy," cried Mr. Brace, "there's something behind all this. What's in the wind? What scheme are you up to?"

Fred seated himself, and told the editor the whole story, of the flight and rescue of Mrs. Brierly, her recapture, and the disappearance of her husband. Mr. Brace listened with a countenance full of sympathy. He could see in it even more than Fred, for he well knew the power which a brutal husband has over a weak and yielding wife.

"If you only saw her once," said the anxious lad. "So pretty, and sweet, and innocent. And the baby a lump of niceness. I tell you what, that rat's got to be smoked out of his hole."

"Prepare your item," rejoined Mr. Brace. "Bring it to me. I will see that it goes in."

In the next edition of the *Morning Star* ap-

peared Fred's shot, in the form of a startling paragraph, headed in large type,

"THE WAYS OF A WESTERN POLITICIAN!"

It was a pungent expose of Bob Brierly and his political methods. Fred had managed to pick up many points in that gentleman's history, and he made of it a cutting story of rascality and trickery, in which every mode of dodging, and every style of underhand dishonesty formed a part. He took good care, however, not to allude to his wife. That was dangerous ground to tread on. The article ended:

"We learn that this *Honorable* gentleman is now *honoring* our city with his presence. There has been no public ovation got up for him yet, which is surprising, since his *peculiar* political methods are not unknown to some of our city statesmen. We could easily name for him a band of brother-spirits without having to inspect the roll-books of the penitentiary. If the honorable gentleman in question will call at this office, we shall be happy to give him a list of names. They might compare notes. Quite likely our Ring magnates might give him some useful points. It is doubtful if he could teach them any new tricks in return. They are fully up in the art of dodging and grabbing."

"That ought to fetch him," cried Fred. "If he has a skin as thick as an elephant I bet he feels that. Look out, Mr. Brace. It's going to be club or revolver."

CHAPTER XV.

FRED NAILS HIS PREY.

At two o'clock on the afternoon of the day in which the obnoxious paragraph appeared, a short, stout, red-faced individual stumped with heavy tread into the office of the *Morning Star*, his eyes blazing, his countenance inflamed with anger.

"Where is the editor of this paper?" he furiously demanded. "Just trot me out that infernal two-faced, white-livered son of a Rocky Mountain coyote, blast his god-darned picture! I've got a bit of business with that gentleman."

"How do you do?" exclaimed Mr. Brace, bustling politely up. "Glad to see you. Take a seat sir. Which editor would you like to see? City editor, country editor, local news editor, foreign item editor? Shall be glad to accommodate you."

"I want the dirty skunk that put that blazing lie in the paper about the Honorable Robert Brierly; that's me, sir." He swelled himself with importance. "I want to make sour-kROUT out of that chap, and if I don't do it, blast me! Trot him out, now. I'm going to interview him. Blame his ugly picture!"

"You don't mean to say that you are the Honorable Robert Brierly?" remarked Mr. Brace, in a tone of great reverence.

"I'm just that individual."

"And you saw that unfortunate item? That was too bad. It was put in on the sly by our Western editor. He's got a grudge against the party. Trying his prettiest to hurt it. Discharged him this morning. He's off for Chicago. I am so sorry I didn't know you were coming. I would certainly have kept him here till you could interview him."

"That's an infernal lie!" yelled the furious visitor. "Trot him out, or I'll smash your office! It's a libel, and I'm going to make a stake out of your high-toned old paper. You hear me!"

"Oh, that's all right," soothingly said Mr. Brace. "So this is the Honorable Robert Brierly? I am glad you called on us while in the city. Have you been round among the authorities? I would be glad to introduce you."

"No. I've been laying like a lame rat in the hospital, with a smashed leg, thanks to your devilish railroads. That's another stake I'm going to make. I'll bleed that railroad."

"Have you a statement to make? We shall be glad to print it," cried Mr. Brace, seizing a pen. "We'll make all right for that other unlucky item."

"But that's in the paper yet."

"Oh, I'll fix that. Trust me. We can say in to-morrow's edition that there was a mistake in the name. It was Jake Blodger, of Oregon, we meant. We can whitewash you, Mr. Brierly, so your friends wouldn't know you. Now what have you got to say about that accident?"

Fred Flyer sat in a corner, in full hearing of this conversation, but out of sight of the blustering visitor. He laughed till his sides were ready to split at the way Mr. Brace played his trout. He had finally to stuff his hat in his mouth and steal away through a side door to prevent an explosion.

"It's richer than roast beef and gravy," declared Fred. "Ain't he sold, though?"

When Mr. Brierly left the office, thoroughly

cooled down, an hour afterward, in company with Mr. Brace, who had invited him to imbibe at a neighboring saloon, Fred Flyer was not far in the rear.

"Sorry I can't give you an introduction to the mayor to-day," said Mr. Brace, regretfully, as they parted at the saloon door. "But you know how it is with us newspaper men. The minutes are hours with us. Hope I'll have a chance some day. And when you're going West I'll give you the Chicago address of that runaway editor. Good-day, Mr. Brierly."

"If I tumble on that fellow I'll be sudden death to his corporation. You hear that," cried the irate Westerner.

A lurking smile was on Mr. Brace's countenance as he turned away.

"When I take you to the mayor's office, you hulking rogue," he said, "it will be when the cows begin to give wine instead of milk."

Mr. Brierly walked away with an air of great importance. The editor's praise had been sweet incense to his soul, and he felt ten feet higher than he had been an hour before.

His injured leg was still weak, and he soon took refuge in a street-car, without noticing that a spry specimen of the city had followed him. Fred stood on the rear platform, out of sight of his game, yet in readiness to shoot to the pavement at the first sign of Mr. Brierly's leaving the car.

It was at a considerable distance up-town that the Westerner left the car. He looked cautiously around him on reaching the sidewalk, as if he had an inkling that he might be an object of observation. But he failed to see the youthful figure which was crowded into a deep doorway, quite out of sight.

"Prime," said Fred to himself. "He's afraid of being followed. That shows he's got some devilry afoot. But if he flings this coon off the track now I'll give him leave to punch my head. I'm going to stick to him like a sand-burr to a nigger's wool."

Mr. Brierly moved along the little-frequented street, looking about him in a wide-awake fashion that put Fred on his mettle. Instead of the latter walking onward in the usual manner he simply shot from door to door, hiding in each, and waiting the next opportunity for a break. Fortunately it was a street with deep doorways, in which he could readily conceal himself.

Ten minutes of this exercise and Mr. Brierly was nailed. He stopped before a house in a narrow side-street, took a cautious look around, and entered. He had not fairly disappeared ere Fred was at the door.

"Number 1089 Clinton street. That's nailed," cried Fred. "Got you holed, you ripstaving old blackleg! And I'm going to get that woman out of your clutches, or something's going to bust. But how's it to be done? That's the rub. Got to get my thinking-cap on, sure pop."

Fred sought a neighboring street, and seated himself on a fire-plug, with his feet against a lamp-post, and his cap drawn down over his eyes. He had a big job of thinking on hand, and wanted to get down to it comfortably.

Meanwhile Mr. Brierly made his way into the house, and entered a rear room on the ground floor, where sat a woman actively sewing. She was a hard-featured personage, enough like himself to be a near relation.

"How's the patient?" he asked. "All right, eh? Ain't been no tantrums?"

"Quiet as a mouse" was the answer. "She won't cut up any shindig where I am, that I promise you. She's a chicken-hearted creature, anyhow. I'd rather have somebody that it would be some credit to manage."

"That's all you know about it," he growled in reply. "Don't tell me 'bout her being easy managed. Why, I've been squeezing for a week, and can't get her to come to terms. She hangs on to that cash like grim death."

"You're too soft-hearted, that's what ails you," remarked the woman, scornfully. "I know if it had been me I'd have brung her before now."

"You're welcome to the job then, if you want it," he surlily answered. "You ought to have been the man of the family, Liza, for you're hard as iron."

"Well for you you've got such a sister to help you out, or your game would fall through. Give her over to me, Bob. I'll pinch her. But I won't do it without pay. You're to give me a share of the spoils."

"Go ahead, then. I'm sick of the job, anyhow. Fetch her to terms, make her sign over the property, and I'll see that you get your divvy."

In an upper room of the same house sat Mrs. Brierly, very sad and disconsolate, her soft face mournful, her eyes wet with unexpressed emotion. Yet behind all this show of weakness there was something else, a look of quiet but undaunted resolution, which her brutal husband had in vain tried to break down.

She pressed the child tightly to her breast, and looked with eyes of motherly fondness into its face.

"Only for you, my angel," she fondly remarked, "I could not fight against him—only for you. He might take and squander my fortune at his will. But he shall not leave you a beggar. He may kill me if he will, but he shall not squander that which I am saving for you. Ah, sweet! I would be willing to die and be done with this cold world, only that I must live for you, my darling!"

The babe was sleeping in her arms. She nursed it awhile with fond affection. Then she laid it softly in the cradle, and took her seat at the window, her head resting wearily upon the sill, while her eyes were fixed hopelessly upon the medley of roofs that alone were visible from her station.

"If I could only escape," she murmured. "Yet they keep me locked tightly here. And that woman is a veritable dragon. What has become of that kind-hearted boy? I should not have left the shelter he found me. I should have fought against it. What must he have thought when he returned and found me gone? Ah, I am too weak to deal with a world like this."

Her eyes wandered restlessly over the roofs before her. They were of houses in the next street, but the streets here were not very far asunder. Suddenly she gave a startled movement. A head had made its appearance over the edge of an adjoining roof, with a pair of sharp eyes keenly fixed on her face.

She started back, yet it was but for a moment. There was something familiar in that face. A second look and she clapped her hands in joy. It was the well-remembered countenance of Fred Flyer.

His shoulders now appeared, and then his whole form, as he crept over the ridge of the roof, and slid down the nearer side, letting himself drop to the roof of a shed below. He was scarce twenty feet distant from her window.

Fred made signs with his hands, but she tried in vain to discover their meaning. It was worse than Greek to her. He continued his efforts, but stopped after awhile in impatient vexation. It was waste labor. She could not understand him.

"Hist!" he cried, in subdued tones. "Is the coast clear?"

"Yes," she answered, with the same caution.

"What's he doing? And what am I to do? Tell me quick. Can't we play some counter-march on Bob Brierly?"

"He is trying to force me to settle my property on him. I have refused. I am determined to keep it for my child."

"Why don't you settle it on the baby, then, and discount the Honorable?"

"I would! Oh, I gladly would! But how can I? I am in prison here."

"That's a mighty good notion. Leave it to me. I'm your boss. Keep a stiff upper lip. Don't give an inch. I'll settle his hash, you bet."

Fred slid down from the shed and disappeared. All was silent again. She looked after him with eyes in which new hope beamed.

"Bless his sweet young face," she murmured. "I hope Heaven will reward him, as I cannot. He will save me yet, I know he will. He is so brave and kind."

The door of the room opened with a snap.

Mrs. Brierly turned, expecting to see her husband. On the contrary, she beheld the harsh face of his stony-hearted sister. The woman stood gazing sternly at her.

"Well," she coldly asked, "are you ready yet to come to your senses, and love, honor and obey your husband, as you promised at the altar?"

"Yes, in everything that duty demands," answered Mrs. Brierly, firmly.

"Then duty commands you to sign that paper. Are you ready? Shall we bring the attorney?"

"Never. What have you to do with it, woman? Is not one tyrant enough for me to deal with?"

"I've taken the job away from that chicken-hearted fool, that's all. You've been playing with him, madam, but you can't play with me. You'll not see this brat again till you come to your senses."

As she spoke she snatched up the sleeping child from the cradle, and ran hastily to the door.

With a scream like that of a lioness that has been deprived of her cub the mother followed her; but too late; the door was closed and locked.

The poor prisoner screamed and implored, beat against the door until the blood ran from her hands, prayed and begged for her child and at last sunk in moaning agony to the floor. But all in vain. The child-stealer was a woman without a heart.

CHAPTER XVI.

BUYING A SIGNATURE WITH A BABY.

"LUCKY I knew the folks that lived in that house," said Fred to himself, as he walked gleefully away from the locality. "Got them on the lookout. They're the right stripe, they are. If any rascality turns up they'll post me. Now comes the next job. If I can only smuggle in a lawyer and get her to sign everything over to the baby unbeknown to her sharp husband, won't there be fun. She can sign what she pleases for him afterward, but it won't be worth a pinch of snuff. Lawsee! ain't I got the Honorable Bob by the horns? And I know just the man for the job."

Fred made his way toward the office of a certain legal acquaintance of his, whom he knew to be ready for any sharp trick, and who would delight in playing a countermarch on such a customer as Mr. Robert Brierly.

His way took him past the *Press* office, in front of which stood the reporter whom he had so cleverly chased. Fred found himself unceremoniously seized by the arm, while a face full of half-angry curiosity confronted him.

"Tell me how you did it, you little fox, and I'll forgive you," cried the reporter. "If you don't, hang me if I don't owe you a pounding."

"If you feel like paying your debts there's a good chance," answered Fred, defiantly. "I'm little but I'm lively. You can peg in as soon as you've a mind."

"No, no. You know, you rat, that there would be a policeman here in two minutes. Come, come, my lad, you're a spry chap, and I admire your sharpness. Don't think that I bear you any ill-will. But I want to know how in the thunder you got in ahead of us that morning."

"Can't tell the secrets of the office," rejoined Fred, quietly. "Pledged, you know. On my honor. I'd like to tell you, but it's dead against business rules."

"That's all fudge. And you won't have the chance for that trick again, so you might as well let it out. There was nothing in ahead of our train."

"Wasn't there, then?" asked Fred. "There's where you're off your eggs."

"What was it? We chartered the only locomotive at the station."

"There was something ahead of that locomotive, for all that."

"What was it?"

"The cow-catcher."

"Why, hang it all, you ain't trying to say that you rode in on the cow-catcher? But no. That is impossible. Nobody could have done it, on that night, and lived. Besides, when our train was stopped, there was nobody about the engine but the engineer and fireman."

"You didn't look sharp enough," answered Fred, "or you might have seen a boy of my size and weight striking out across the fields. And a bit afterward you might have caught me sleighing into the city among a load of milk-cans. When the *Star* takes a job in hand, it puts it through, you can bet on that."

"Is that the truth, boy?"

"If you can think of any better way, I'd like to hear it. Good-by. Next time there's a hasty job on hand, I'll show you some new trick. Can't discount the *Star* nohow."

Fred was off with a laugh, in search of his legal friend.

We must go forward to the day succeeding that in which the above-mentioned events occurred, and back to the prison of the unfortunate mother, whom we left extended in agony on the floor.

She is now seated, with eyes still wet with tears, and a face that seems to have grown ten years older since the previous day. Ages of pain and anguish appear in the deep lines of that sorrowful face. No torture could be deeper than that she had suffered.

"I don't want the brat," exclaimed her brutal husband, who was standing before her. "If you come to your senses, you can do what you please

with it. But if you're going to keep on playing the fool, you shall never set eyes on it again."

"Oh, give me my child! Give me my darling!" she moaned.

"Hand over the cash, and you can have it, and can go to Old Nick with it if you want. I've had enough of your milk-faced babyness. You can have a separation square off, you and the baby both. Hang me if I want anything more to do with such a woman."

"Where is my child? What have you done with my child?" was all her answer. There was but the one thought in her distracted mind.

"Are you crazy, woman?" he cried, rudely shaking her. "Listen to me. If you don't sign that paper you'll never see the brat again. I'll take it West, and bring it up as a wild-cap, and marry her off to some blackleg. I ain't to be played with any longer. Say the word."

"I'll do anything, anything! Take the money! Take all! But give me the child!"

Her voice was raised almost to a scream with the intense anguish that filled her soul.

"That's sensible," he said, with a grin of satisfaction. "Keep to that and it's all square. But if you go back on it I'm done with the job. I'll slide off West and you can whistle for the baby. Hold your level, now. I'll go for the lawyer."

He left her alone again. But her agony was enlivened with a ray of hope. He had promised to give her the child and set her free from his hated presence. What was money, what was anything, to this? She could work, she could beg, she could do anything, if she only had her child.

An hour passed. At the end of that time footsteps again sounded in the house. They approached her door, which was thrown open. Her husband entered, in company with a legal-looking personage.

"Now, my dear," he remarked, in very soft accents, "we have all in shape. This gentleman has the papers drawn up ready to sign. I hope you are feeling better?"

"Yes, yes," she feebly responded. "But be quick. I pray you be quick. I cannot endure much more."

"You hear, Mr. Mason. My wife, as I told you, has had a nervous spasm. Let us finish the job at once."

The lawyer opened his bag and took from it some folded papers, which he spread out on the table. As he did so the poor wife turned her eyes to the window, with a faint hope of seeing again the welcome face of Fred Flyer, bringing her new hope. She rebelled in her heart against being forced to sacrifice her property. But no face was there, and she turned again to her tormentors.

"I am ready," she said, feebly.

"In a moment, madam," answered the lawyer. "We will need a witness to these papers, Mr. Brierly."

"Will my sister answer?"

"Certainly."

"I will call her then." He went to the stairs and called loudly for "Liza!"

In a few moments she entered the room, as grim and stern as ever.

"We wish your signature as witness to these papers," remarked the lawyer. "They are an assignment by Mrs. Brierly, of all right and title in certain properties named, to her husband, Robert Brierly."

"In return for which I am to have full charge of my child?" she demanded.

"Certainly, certainly. That is the understanding."

"Then bring the child! I will not trust you. Bring me my child! I will not sign those papers unless I have my child safely in my arms. Bring her! You have hid her away! You, woman!"

Liza looked questioningly at her worthy brother, who nodded assent.

"Yes. Let her have the brat. It's a square deal, and I'm a square rooster, right through. When I say a thing, that's gospel. Fetch the baby and let her have it. If she plays contrary we can take it away again."

Liza disappeared. In a few minutes she returned with the stolen child, which she handed with a scornful smile to the mother. The poor, tortured woman clasped it eagerly to her breast, as if she had regained a lost part of herself.

"Now, see here," announced her husband. "That little critter is only lent you. The laws of this State give it over to me, and I'm bound to carry out the law, square. Sign the paper and I'll give up my rights. But if you're going to keep kicking ag'in' common-sense, I'm the chap that will freeze to that baby."

"Yes, yes, I will sign. But read me the paper first. It must be understood in it that the child is given to my charge."

The lawyer read, with a prolixity that was not very pleasing to his client, the deed of transfer. Mrs. Brierly listened intently.

"That is not satisfactory," she said, firmly. "There is nothing there giving me the custody of the child. I will not trust you. It must be down in writing. You are deceiving me."

"What the blazes do I want with the baby, or you either, so I get the cash?" cried her husband, scornfully. "Here, I'll give you legal separation and full charge of the brat, over my signature. Maybe that will satisfy you."

He sat down and dashed off a paper, which he signed with a flourish.

"There you are." He handed it to his wife.

"That ought to satisfy you."

"Is that legal?" she asked the lawyer.

"Perfectly, madam."

"Then witness it."

He did so, asking Liza to also affix her name as witness.

"Mr. Brierly can scarcely go back on that." He handed her the paper, which she hastily and nervously concealed. "Now, madam, your signature here, if you please."

She took the pen, with trembling fingers, and seated herself to write, still clasping the child with her left arm.

The pen was already on the paper, and the first letters of her name traced, when it dropped from her fingers to the floor, at a loud voice that came to her ears:

"Hold your hosses there! Don't you never sign that paper for them busted blacklegs!"

It was the voice of Fred Flyer, whose curly head appeared at the window.

CHAPTER XVII.

HOW TO DEAL WITH A POLITICIAN.

"Jist suppose you drap that little game. It's our innings now."

Fred jumped from the window into the room. He was followed by another person, a black-whiskered man, who climbed more deliberately through the window.

"What the blazes does this mean?" cried Brierly, in a rage. "Who are you and how dare you break into my house?" He rushed to the window just in time to face a third individual, from whom he slightly recoiled. It was Mr. Brace, the editor of the *Morning Star*.

"Found your front door locked," explained Fred, "so I just borrowed a ladder and took a look in. Found there was some fun going on, and invited these gentlemen up. Hope we don't intrude?"

As he spoke Mr. Brace and another of the *Star* staff entered the room.

"Blast my eyes if I don't have the law of you for this!" roared Brierly. "It's rank burglary! Get out now, before I fling you out!"

"Nary time," answered Fred. "Thought you might want to, so I brought enough along to give you a good handful. Don't you never sign that document, Mrs. Brierly. It's a swindle right through."

The tormented wife had sprung up with a gesture of joy on seeing this diversion. She now stood clasping the child tightly in her arms, and looking with eager eyes into Fred's earnest face.

"I'd like to know who's to hinder?" yelled her husband, in a fury. "Sign your name, you fool of a woman! Haven't you the sense to know that these customers can't help you? Sign it, or by Heaven I'll have the baby!"

The black-whiskered man who had followed Fred into the room now stepped forward, with a resolute countenance.

"Stop just there," he sternly remarked. "Is he trying to compel you, madam, by threats of taking the child?"

"Yes, sir," she answered, with a look of hope.

"He cannot do it, then. The laws of this State give the child into the custody of the mother till it is seven years of age."

"That's a lie!" yelled the furious husband. "It's a lie, straight out! Isn't it?" He appealed to his own lawyer.

"No. I must admit that it is the truth."

"See here," cried Brierly, striking the document with his open hand; "you've agreed to sign this, and I'm bound to hold you to it. If you can have the baby till it's seven, I can take it afterward, and if I don't give it a sweet education it's queer. You'd best keep your word if you know when you're well off."

Poor Mrs. Brierly looked distractedly from one to another. She was like a cornered mouse. Her indecision was ended by Fred,

who presented another paper, which he spread over the previous one.

"This is the document for you to sign, Mrs. Brierly."

"What is it?" she eagerly asked.

"It is a transfer of all your property to your child," said the lawyer who accompanied Fred.

"You, of course, keep a life right in it, but cannot dispose of the capital. I wish you to thoroughly understand before signing."

"I am willing to sign that," she eagerly declared. "I want it to go to the child—every cent of it."

She seized the pen with a firm hand. All present expected that her husband would make some opposition to her signature, but he stood unmoved, a cynical smile curling his lip. In a moment her name was affixed.

"There," she cried, triumphantly. "That is done! It is all my darling's now!"

"Think so?" asked Mr. Brierly, tauntingly.

"Yes. Is it not?"

"Guess not. Suppose a husband hasn't any rights? I've got to put my fist to that paper before it's worth a pinch of snuff. Do you think I'm going to do it? Maybe you're trying to buy Bob Brierly for a fool. Thought you were doing it very neat, didn't you? That card won't play, Mrs. Brierly."

She looked questioningly at the lawyer, who nodded assent.

"You had better sign, Mr. Brierly," quietly remarked Mr. Brace.

"I had, eh? Much I will! What's the reason I'd better sign?"

"Only because our Western editor has come back from Chicago, where he has picked up some interesting items about the Honorable Robert Brierly. I am afraid we cannot keep him from ventilating that gentleman's character in the *Morning Star*. If you sign that paper I will see what can be done with him."

"Do you mean to threaten me?" Mr. Brierly had grown slightly pale.

"Oh, no! not at all. I only wish to say that we've probed your career pretty thoroughly. It is not a very sweet-smelling one. If you don't sign that paper, into the *Star* it goes, the whole story. And I shall take good care that your Western constituents see it."

This was no trifling threat. Mr. Brierly well knew there were incidents in his life that were not very savory. A politician dreads the newspapers as he would dread a rattlesnake. If his whole history were spread before the public his political career was ended. He looked for a moment at Mr. Brace as if half inclined to fling him out of the window. But there were too many to try that game.

Suddenly turning, with a gesture of contempt, he dashed his name to the paper.

"There it is," he declared. "Make the most of it."

He drew sullenly back as the lawyer stepped up.

"I should like your signatures here as witnesses," he remarked. "Mr. Brace and Mr. Mason. Please sign here."

They did so. The lawyer folded the paper, and placed it in his pocket.

"I hardly think there will be any call for your document," he satirically remarked to his professional brother.

"You think you've got me foul, don't you?" snarled the discomfited politician. "Maybe I ain't as green as you fancy. I'll take that little paper back, Mrs. Brierly, which you got from me under false pretenses. That little deed of separation."

"No, no!" she muttered, drawing back in alarm.

"You pretend to be an honorable woman," he sneered. "I gave it to you on your promise to sign that deed. Is that your honor! To keep a document got by false pretenses?"

He knew with whom he had to deal. With a look of proud disdain she felt in her pockets for the document.

"What is it?" asked Fred, curiously.

"Only my consent to a separation, she to have custody of the child," answered Mr. Brierly, with sneering triumph. "Guess I'll take that back. I've got some fatherly affection, you see. The little thing is mine after it is seven. And won't I take delight in giving it a nice education?"

"Here is the paper," said his wife, proudly, though her face worked with agony. "I scorn to take a dishonorable advantage, or to keep what was received under an unfulfilled promise. But you might be generous for once, Robert, and let me keep it."

"Much I will," he retorted, with a brutal laugh. "I'm quite likely to. Just pass it over."

She extended her hand with the paper, while her face bent over the child. She could not bear to see the loss of her fond hopes.

"Hold your horses," exclaimed Fred, stepping between, and taking the paper from Mrs. Brierly's extended hand. "I'd like to have a little word in this. The Honorable Bob Brierly can have this document. Nobody's going to hinder. But if he takes it, just as sure as shooting, there's a nice little story going into the *Morning Star*."

"What story?" cried the politician, angrily. "You are trying lies on me. I defy you all. You know nothing about me. I dare you to name any story."

"We might put in about that little mining scheme," answered Fred, "in which you chiseled some green speculators out of their money."

"Put it in. I don't care a fig. Hand over that paper." He laughed in scorn.

"Or the little item of how Robert Brierly was caught robbing the county office at Bloomington, Montana."

"Hand over that paper." But Mr. Brierly had ceased to laugh.

"Or the little story about how a man was knifed in a bar-room at Benton, Iowa. And whose name was on the knife-handle. The folks in Montana don't know that story. It will be nuts for them."

Mr. Brierly glared at the speaker with distended eyes.

"What do you mean?" he faltered. "How did you—"

"Oh, we newspaper boys have our ways of getting news."

"Keep the paper and be blazed! But hang me if I don't get even with you yet!"

He turned and rushed in rage and fear from the room. Fred had struck home. The politician dared not have that incident in his life made public.

"Let me take charge of these papers for you, Mrs. Brierly," said the lawyer. "You have triumphed over your brutal husband. But they are not safe in your hands."

"I shall be too grateful," she answered. "I am not fit to contend with him."

"That's so," remarked Fred. "But I've a notion that I'm his match."

But we must end this scene, and with it the active incidents of Mrs. Brierly's story. Her discomfited husband went West. He had had enough of Eastern ways, and concluded that it was safest to complete his political record in the wilds of Montana.

As for Mrs. Brierly she has settled down in Philadelphia, glad to be as far as possible from her *Honorable* husband, and happy in the custody of her child, who is growing up into the sweetest and dearest of little girls.

Fred Flyer, still a reporter on the *Morning Star*, is a frequent and always welcome visitor at her residence, and one of the chief delights of the soul of her little daughter. And he will never cease to laugh over the way the *Star* corps settled the hash of the Honorable Bob Brierly.

THE END.

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